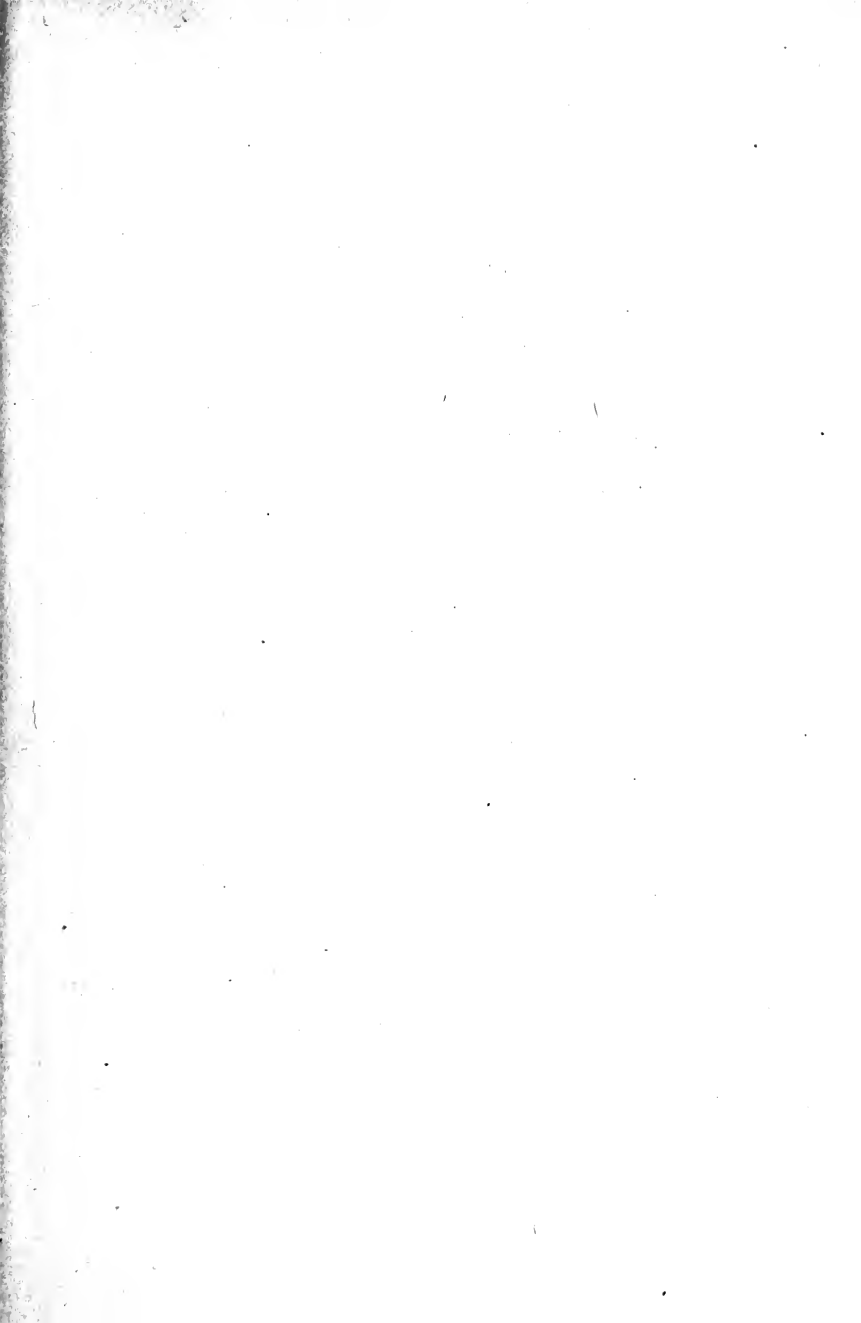


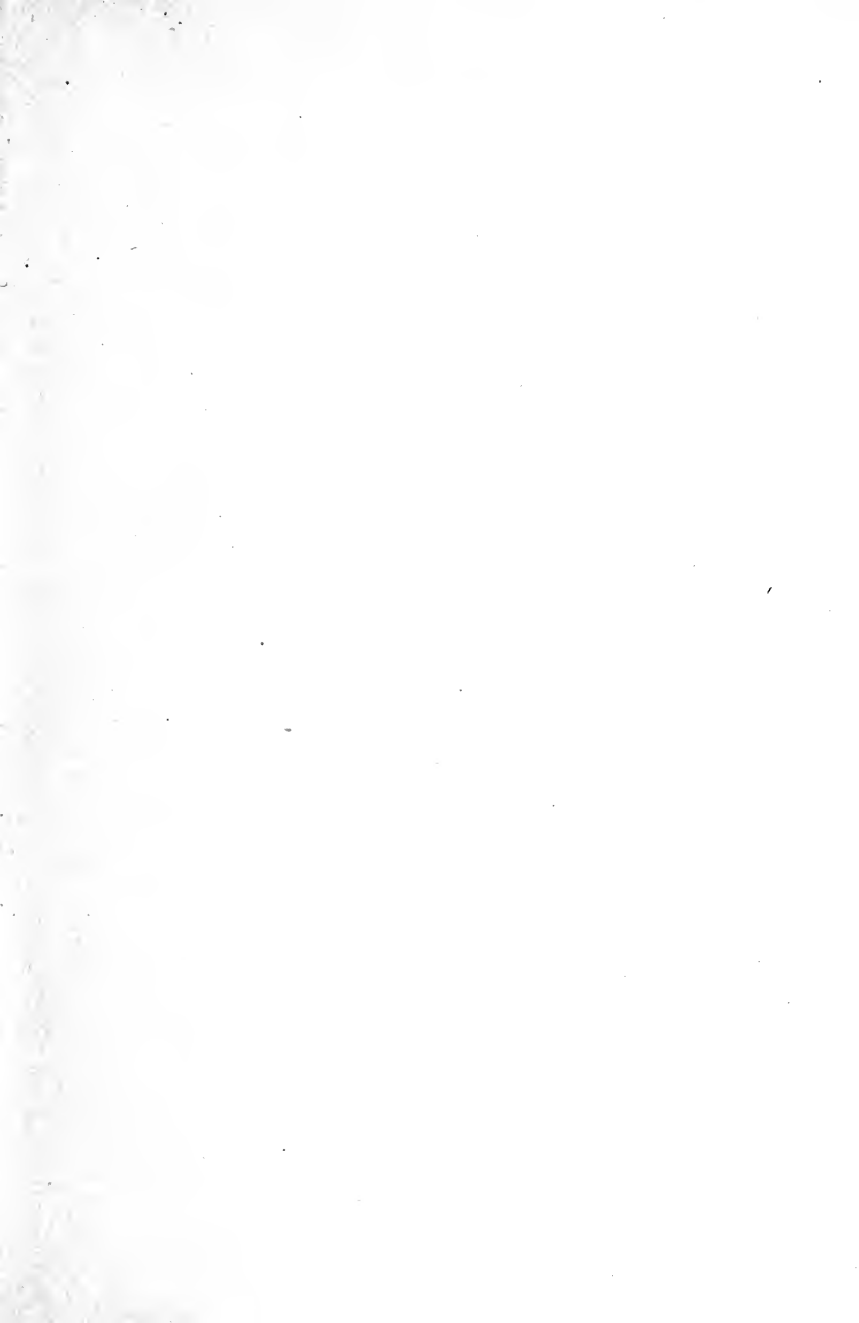


*Edith
Bonham
by
Mary Hallock
Foote*



BERTRAND SMITH'S
"ACRES OF BOOKS"
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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

EDITH BONHAM

EDITH BONHAM

BY

MARY HALLOCK FOOTE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FRIEND OF FIFTY YEARS
— HERSELF THE PERFECT FRIEND —
HELENA DE KAY
WIFE OF RICHARD WATSON GILDER
1866-1916

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EDITH BONHAM

PART I

THE STUDIO AND THE FARM

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I

MY father shared a theory at one time that genius in families takes the line of descent which crosses that of sex: clever mothers, clever sons, and the same with fathers and daughters. He had no sons. Of his two daughters, marriage disposed of Essie so young that her genius, except for enjoying life in spite of frequent babies, had little chance to show itself. Anything of the sort his youngest might be supposed to have inherited through having him for a parent, he did what he could to bring out in the fond persuasion that I was meant to be an artist.

He gave me drawing-lessons himself, when other things did not interfere. I was glad when they did. He was an impatient, a witty, and often a hurtfully sarcastic teacher. His feelings in my case were too much involved, but so were mine! There were few things I would not have done to please him as his daughter, or aside from that fact, in any direction that did not strike me as hopeless. But I did resent being reduced to tears in his presence over a wretched cast-drawing, the work of my own hands and of perhaps a week's misspent labor.

Before he gave me up finally, I was sent, in my eighteenth year, as a professional pupil to the Cooper

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School of Design for Women; we lived in New York. Four flights of stone stairs with high-ceiled halls between go up to the floor where the day-classes for women had their home in the old Cooper Union Building on Eighth Street. Racing up the last flight one Monday morning when we were both late, I passed a girl whose face I knew by sight. She had lagged a moment to recover breath. We smiled at each other, and she took the stairs again just behind me. I waited.

"I've noticed you so often," I gasped.

"And I you!" she responded with a sigh to match.

"Can't we ask each other's names? Mine is Edith Bonham."

"Oh, we all know who you are! They speak of your father here with bated breath. But that has nothing to do with my wanting to know *you* — ever since I saw you." She fetched another sigh with the end of her sentence.

We were going down the main hall towards the row of coat-closets; the winter morning and the stairs, and some excitement she seemed to get out of our meeting, had given her a color to gaze at.

"Then don't let's waste any more time," said I, — "or breath."

Anne Aylesford was her name, and her home, as I somehow knew, perhaps from the neat but negligible way she dressed, was in the country — not near New York. She was spending the winter with friends who lived in one of the suburbs, which meant getting up early to take the business men's train.

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"I've never missed it before ; and I don't suppose you are often as late as this? It was luck — pure luck, or fate!" she said, with that extraordinary look of joy her face expressed.

"Don't you ever do anything about it when you want to know a person? Do you leave it all to fate?"

"I should never have done anything about knowing *you*." She smiled and shook her head. "I did n't want it to come that way!"

I asked her if she stayed to work in the afternoons as many of the professional pupils did.

"I stay till the scrub-women drive me out, but I don't think I gain much by it. What alcove are you in?"

I was in the life-class in painting, I told her, through false hopes raised in my teachers, who generally thought I might do better in almost any other medium than the one I happened to be working in. "I ought to be in the Antique, plugging along at cast-drawing."

"Where I am," she said. "I'm drawing the Dis-cobolus" (of Myron). "He breaks my heart!"

I told her I knew him well, and all his kin, and I should be around that afternoon to condole with her.

It was as much a case of love at first sight as if one of us had belonged to the "opposite sex." A touch of enchantment akin to what is called first love (as if there were no parents in the world and brothers and sisters, to say nothing of one's first doll) hovers over my memories of that winter ; some subtle sweetness which as the days went by was in-

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tensified for us both by the pang of unsuccess. We knew that we were not making progress to warrant our returning another year. In my case it was chiefly a vicarious pain; I hated to disappoint papa. With her it was mixed with a nagging sense of dishonesty in being there at all in the place of some one with more talent to improve an opportunity which she regarded as wasted upon her. "Of course I shall not let them" — her parents — "send me next winter. Manzoni leaves me alone in a way that shows he's given me up. He tells me I have qualities as a worker that look as if I were meant for 'something,' but he is n't at all sure it is Art!" We laughed at this gloomily.

"Is there anything left in life for you?" I mocked.

And she answered seriously, "You are left. If I may keep you I can manage without Art."

We arranged to sit together during anatomy lectures and the Friday review with criticism of class-compositions; as she brought her lunch I now brought mine and we had the noon hour for solid talks, arms around each other, walking up and down the cold halls past the colder Greeks and Romans on their pedestals, or mounted on top of the row of coat-closets with dust on their godlike curls. We did not work to excess in the afternoons; the combined joy in each other and lassitude of failure took the heart out of our efforts. We sought some deserted alcove among empty chairs and easels hung with discarded drawing-aprons that looked exactly like the girls who wore them, and there we sat while the light failed

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and talked a stream which never failed. Long before the spring term came, with its languor and lengthening light and sounds from the street through open windows, and other temptations to idleness and more talk, I had explained to her most of the perplexities and incongruities of my own life, and she had envied me, as she said, a life so crowded with people interesting beyond any she had ever heard of as living to-day, and a future full of possibilities, while hers pointed straight ahead in the same old path her forbears had trod for generations. She was not seeing anything of New York: her morning and evening trains, the ordinary New York busy crowd at the busiest hours; her people were not in society, so called; but she felt the thrill of the city's life in her veins. I think it was a secret anguish to her not to come back. But she was inflexible. I asked her why not try one winter more? — we were all experiments, most of us doomed to fail.

"I have tried," she answered. "I drew at school; I've had lessons before. It was agreed that this winter should decide. It rests with me to make the report. I could persuade them at home that I've been a success, or I could ask father to send me back as a paying pupil; then I should cheat no one but the family. But, it's like knowing you — art is too beautiful to scuffle for; one does that for bread and butter. Where art *is* bread and butter, that's another thing; but it's not quite that with me."

This was her little rigid way of seeing it. I liked it so — the rigidity, the romance, the reins of home

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discipline she worked under, and the fresh wild zest for life itself. I thought it probable she was right; that none of the obvious forms of expression were quite meant for her. Life would take hold of her some day through intensity of feeling (as *I* seemed to have taken hold of her) and she would let it carry her to great lengths.

We agreed that I was to visit her in June, at her home at Lime Point on the Hudson; and that at the first opportunity when we were lucky enough to go, her parents must be persuaded to spare her for a trip abroad with us, papa and me. I feared there might be subtle risks in the adventure, but it was, on the whole, the safest form our hospitality could take, for her.

We Bonhams, from the forties to the sixties, had seen a good deal of the world in rather jolly ways, at home socially and abroad as travelers of means. Some of us—I speak of the Family, not my own particular group—were navy and embassy people. Most of them had been fortunate in the sense in which my charming, sophisticated papa pretended to hold them unfortunate. He was a painter of progressive theories and a rather cynical—because impatient—temperament. Little art-students might speak of him with bated breath, and his admiring circle of friends did much to keep his spirits up, but his family knew how seldom he sold a picture—he held them at defiant prices. His studio was in our own house, the only part of his patrimony he had not spent in acquiring other things he valued more than

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money before he suddenly found himself impelled to marry. The entire top floor was given up to him — a great beautifully lighted room with some rather dark and crowded adjuncts, but it was out of the way of visiting patrons. He escaped interruptions and much idle chatter on reception days, when influential ladies were making the rounds of the studios, but no doubt he lost some purchasers. We were cramped for bedrooms and our servants did not stay, the good ones, because our hours were so extraordinary. Altogether our domestic arrangements were the despair of our rich kinsfolk in the city, but they were a great convenience to our clever, impecunious friends — those brilliant boys and women New York seemed full of in those days.

Essie and I grew up in an atmosphere of irreverence but of startling sincerity. Promising young artists and some who had been promising for the last twenty-five years, — all the literary and semi-literary with views to impart, — used mamma's overcrowded drawing-room at all hours as a sort of club. They drifted in for midnight talks after the theater. They sat around our hearth and discussed, most amusingly and without any reference to bedtime, everything that went on in the city, in the world, and whatever worlds there be. We children heard it in our beds, in murmurs and bursts of laughter through partition-walls; later we heard it — all this conglomerate talk — with ears wide open and our faculties awake. Language became as the air we breathed from hearing so much of it and a good deal of it rather choice, and

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many phrases that sank without meaning into our young intelligences were quite unforgettable.

This was the chief if not the best part of our education. Schools there were, of course, but when we tried to study at home to keep up in our lessons, there was never a quiet place where we could — the whole house was at the mercy of papa's enchanting but inconsiderate hospitality. He drew people by the force of his charm, but it was mamma who had to take care of them and defend her own brood in that forcing atmosphere. I think she was literally consumed by it — burned out, heart and brain and tireless little feet. How often I have heard papa call her from the top of the studio-stairs: "Louise, will you ask that female what she has done with *all* my paint-rags! If she has burned them *again*, could you find me some more?" Our "females" were divided into those who never cleaned the studio at all and those who drove papa mad with descents upon his sacred properties: either way, it was mamma who made up the deficit and took upon herself the blame. He adored her, — he was never the same after he lost her, — but he never thought about her as a being with a life and separate needs from his own.

Essie married, two years after her death, one of the young literary "aspirants" who knew so well how to woo and win a wife, but not so well how to keep her, in the material sense we were brought up to despise. Her life promised to be as difficult as mamma's, but she took it differently. I saw a good deal of the detached style of housekeeping and the

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optimistic creed with babies, who thrive, notwithstanding, in a manner as sporting as all the rest of their amusing ménage. It scarcely amused me, and it gave me a strong distaste for another studio-marriage in the family. So, although I had my share as I grew up of the extravagant personalities flung at one as to one's looks, and more than my share, and much too soon, of the incipient love-making always going on—or off—in our unmothered existence, not any of it touched me or vitally influenced my future (except to make me feel older than I was)—not nearly as much as did one particular visit to the Aylesfords on the Hudson.

How different with them! They had stayed in one place and cultivated character, and with it some of the excrescences of character that go with old standard types like theirs. They were very earnest, obstinate, dear people, of a great simplicity and kindness, somewhat lacking in pliability and without humor in the literary sense, but strong and sane and faithful to their clear-cut opinions which were as immovable as the limestone rock that underlay their family acres.

The name has clung to the East Shore of the Hudson since the first Aylesford built his house and the lime kiln there, and the little sloop-wharf below it, and cleared the land acquired from the Indians (on a patent from Queen Anne) by the artless methods of those days. The family still lived on a small portion of it—"my Aylesfords," as papa called them. I considered their most valuable possession was a stretch of untouched woods, the slender, somber arbor-vitæ which

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chooses this spot for its habitat. You entered the twilight of their paths, at whatever hour of day, and were wrapped in the spirit of the old-world past, of Italy itself. Here, with steamboats passing below its banks and trains hooting by, this lovely spot had kept its silence and classic uniformity of line and color and light and shade like a lesson, to the wash of the river-tides on its gray-pebbled beach and the grinding of ice packs in winter. Yet not one of the family who owned all this beauty at their very door, ever walked those paths, by moonlight (when they were magical), — by any light, for sentiment or mere pleasure, — not even Nanny in the heyday of her dreams! She must have felt it subconsciously, but it was my privilege to awaken in her an artistic realization of the riches of her home.

“My Aylesfords” dined in the middle of the day and had tea at six o’clock — the most perfectly broiled shad in spring fresh from the river, or in hot weather cottage cheese with lettuce dressed by some old English cookbook rule, and a course of “preserves” or fresh fruit, and delicious home-made cake — such sponge cake! the ten-egg variety, and *such* baked-apples, jellied in their own sweetness and smothered in thick cream! I used to put on pounds on those visits! The woods were closer to the shore than the house; they marched with it for a quarter of a mile on the Aylesford land. They opened their dark, cloaked files for glimpses of the river, or where a road or a brook went down. The pent-road (I speak of it by the name they used) ended at the old wharf

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where fishing-boats were moored and shad-nets spread to dry, and above it was the lime kiln which had burned its own rock, they told me, for six generations. All these homely details made up their peculiar treasure to me. I had never seen anything like it in my country-house visiting, nor abroad in places equally rich in local color and the indigenous flavor that had gathered here: pure American it was, of the Eastern States, and I was pure American of New York and Europe, yet it was newer to me than any part of Europe that artists visit. I longed for papa to see it with! But I would not have brought him there, for that or for anything!

Nanny I used to drag down for walks in the woods after tea, and keep her there till moonlight sprinkled their smooth, unlittered floors, and one felt as if any moment the voice of a nightingale through the cedar aisles might burst upon our silence and the river's wash on the beach below. Often we could hear the beat of oars or the sound of singing on the water, and as these boating-parties on warm nights sometimes landed and picnicked in the cove, or even penetrated the wood paths in their freedom, and as they might be "nobody knows who" from across the river, Mrs. Aylesford had her doubts about these moonlight strolls. I would have given much for permission to go out in a boat by ourselves, for Nanny could row. But that was unthinkable. There was no son of the house to take us. The family, bred in an exclusiveness peculiar to our old Eastern farming aristocracy, cultivated very little social intercourse with their

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neighbors, with whom they had not even the bond of church-going, for they were Unitarians, "free-thinkers" and not strict keepers of the Sabbath. They were the largest landed family, but one of the smallest in numbers, and everybody not an Aylesford or some connection might as well be "across the river," to them.

Nanny, when I first knew her, had never had a lover, she had never been paid "attentions" by any young man, never I think received so much as a "call" from one, in all her rosy nineteen years. But she was very deeply acquainted with Love as praised by the Immortals. She was familiar with its appeals in verse, from "Romeo and Juliet" to "Sonnets from the Portuguese." Her reading had been limited to the books in the house. There seemed to have been fewer purchases of books in her father's time, but they took the "Atlantic Monthly" and "Littell's Living Age," and in the glazed bookcase in the back-parlor, and on certain less orderly shelves in the niche beside the sitting-room fireplace, was a collection of English classics that represented the family reading for several generations. They had no idea of the value of some of these books: the Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy" — a brown leather folio much read! Nanny herself had browsed in its pages quite freely, but her mother thought it too "old" for her. There was Croxall's "Fables" too, which papa would have known more about than I who only saw on the title-page 1722, and knew that its "Cutts" must have been before Bewick and that school. And

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there was an early edition of Burns *with* cuts by Bewick, borrowed, some of them, from other books, perhaps,—it was an American reprint: does any one remember the picture of a child in a field pulling the colt's tail, and the mother flying to the rescue down the steps of a sort of stile? Odd breaks in the list of poets and novelists, Mrs. Aylesford explained as the result of dividing family collections after death. There were no poets later than Young and Thomson (and L. E. L.), no translations from the classics later than Pope, nor from the French later than Lamartine. Of the Germans nothing! No Carlyle, even, to talk about them. There was Dana's "Household Book of Poetry" which Nanny knew from cover to cover, but she had merely had a taste of each great name. It was my joy, on her twentieth birthday, to have given her the first copy of Emerson's "Poems" she had ever taken in her hand, a little brown book in cloth with the imprint of Fields, Osgood & Co. And in the dark winter afternoons in the empty classrooms at Cooper, I had read aloud to her, from my own volume of Matthew Arnold, "Yes, in the sea of life enisled," and the "Buried Life"; and recited from memory, verses from "Proserpine" and the Chorus in "Atalanta," just to convince her that she had been prejudiced against Swinburne; but remembering dear Mrs. Aylesford I did not give him to her, nor even lend him. We shared him on our own terms, which was enough.

She envied me my acquaintance with one or two "foreign" languages which had not been foreign to

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me; I had learned them on the spot at small cost of application, while she had really worked over her Latin. Her parents believed in everything solid, as they called it. Why give a girl a "smattering" of French who would in all probability never use it abroad, and when all the books worth reading can be read just as well in translations! To me — the younger girl — there was something enchanting in the quaintness of her mental preparation for these fresh draughts of the gods it was my happiness to pour into her cup. They as a family were land-poor as we were book-poor. My father could no more resist buying books he could not afford (I think myself he was intended for a writer) than Mr. Aylesford could stay his hand from digging up a few hundreds to straighten an old boundary-line. Thus I could reinforce her lean and hungry diet from our own, I may say, well-chosen superabundance. When I told papa she had never read a line of George Sand nor Daudet nor Maupassant, — never had heard of Alfred de Musset, though she had read Plutarch's "Morals," he shouted! He demanded that I bring home this "wonder of all days" with me at once. I had not the least intention of it — for one reason, I knew that he would probably call her so to her face! — But of course it had to come.

II

THE AYLESFORDS owned an historic grist-mill that had ground flour for the American army during the Revolution. The story goes that a British officer had been sent up from New York to burn the rebel mill, but fell in love with the daughter of Gill, the owner and miller, and compounded his errand for the promise of her hand in marriage after the war. It is certain the mill was still there, and a daughter of my friend's family did marry a British officer, a Major Aylesford, who settled at Lime Point on his wife's property and became to all intents and purposes an American himself.

I suppose there had been no spare capital to replace the old machinery when it fell out of date, or no custom to warrant such use of it. The place was silent when I knew it, both road and mill. Only a gurgle of water in spring ran under the great overshot wheel hanging idle in the wheel-pit, a cool, stone-lined cavern all moss and shadows. It ran across the road beneath a wooden bridge and flashed out again through the meadow, where it watered the cows and fed sheets of blue violets in May, and buttercups later, and star-grass and dog-toothed violets and rudbeckias. A rough retaining-wall flanked the little rise to the mill-door, and three big capstones had fallen off and lay beside the road below, in the shade of the old pollard

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willows. Nanny and I used to linger here after a hot morning walk, seated on these stones that we called our talking-stones. The third stone we said waited for Him, the improbable but not impossible He, who might come some day and break up our talks, or add an extraneous silence of his own. Whichever one of us he came for must expect that the other would hate him. I said it would never be me! And it was n't: Nanny was the first to go.

She turned her back on us — courtship and marriage and the long journey not to return — all in one summer, while papa and I were loafing and sketching in Normandy. We had begged to have her with us, but her father said it was a "bad year"; he had lost his fruit crop or some other farming tragedy. When we came home she was gone.

Her Young Lochinvar had come out of the West, but he was Canadian born and bred and colléged — McGill, I think Nanny said; and he took her back with him as a bride to some little unheard-of town — I had forgotten in which territory — it was n't even "admitted." And I had never seen this depredator, only his photograph that she had sent me with apologies for a certain expression it wore which she averred was one quite unknown to her. It was a lean, hard face of the executive type which often goes with good drawing, regular features; the great soldiers have been handsome men. I could have accepted him as a member of the Mounted Police, but I hated him as Nanny's husband. She had seen so few of that sort of men; I felt sure she would have been

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defenseless. The eye, and the jaw, and a hawk-lid making a straight fold across the eye—he looked quite capable of stealing her out of the Aylesford nest if he could not have made her his wife in any other way. In fact I believed he had stolen her, and that if I could have been there when she met him first—close to her all that summer—it might never have happened. But then why should n't it!

I gave papa his photograph to abuse knowing how he could do it! But he guessed what it was I wanted of him and went off on the other tack to tease me.

“A good-looking fellow! One quite sees what little Aylesford would be taken with. She'd be an easy mark for a chap like this.” He added something about a “lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,” which I considered offensive on Nanny's account—“But how did she ever come across the rascal in that bucolic place?”

I gave him the facts as I had them from Nanny: how he swam ashore to their dock one pitch-black night when his boat capsized—or perhaps a steam-boat, one of the big night-boats, ran them down. He was being ferried across to catch a late train and a thunder-squall struck the river. The other man was drowned.

“Gracious Heavens! Can such things happen at Lime Point on the Hudson?”

“They can,” I said. “He came into her life just like that!”

“Like a thunder-clap, or a flash of lightning at

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night. And she into his like the morning after? Well; I take it very ill of him to have snatched her before we had our summer abroad together. What is his name — what does she have to call him?"

"Douglas; I suppose she calls him — his name is Douglas Maclay."

"Shade of D. Maria Muloch! He may be 'true,' but he does n't look 'tender.' That face has about as much sensibility as a telegraph-pole."

I had got all I wanted now, his reading of the face expressed with his usual immoderation. I was mollified. "Did you ever knock on a telegraph-pole with a stone and listen?" said I. "There's a sort of person you can jar sensibility out of."

"Let us hope she may jar something out of him." Papa put down the picture and went off on the cold scent of the name, Maclay. He had a fancy for tracing descent and had lately established a link between us and the Aylesfords through Nanny's mother whose family name was Gurney. Papa made a great deal of his vanishing drop of Quaker blood which came by way of the English Gurneys. He loved to drag it in, declaring that if ever he "contracted the habit of divine worship" — Quaker benches for him, on the "men's side," and the peace of one's own thoughts; or — he would wave his hand magnificently — "'Mass and rolling music like a queen'!"

"Nanny had come home on her first visit. She had been home two weeks before they asked me up to Lime Point. I understood, of course, that she must

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see her family alone for a while. But still she seemed to me unrested. I could not keep my eyes off her face — she often looked just the same, and again she would seem so different. Thinner, of course, and the pure, fresh coloring was gone; that was to be expected. She had brought home the worth of her girlish complexion and roundness in that intenser bit of self, a little year-old daughter, named, for Mrs. Aylesford, Phœbè. And here, I thought, is where life at last takes hold! She had had the child in her sole care in a region of no servant class (I remembered her speaking of it in one of her letters as a place where the ladies say “ma’am” and the servants don’t). That would have tired her and excited her too with the vigilance required by such new and poignant responsibilities. She must have felt in coming home that here she could take a long breath in peace and lay her burdens down. This was what her mother had looked forward to; this visit was to have been a complete and much-needed rest. But I suppose the habit of apprehensiveness had fastened upon her highly wrought sensibilities. Imagination, once her friend and playmate, had turned taskmaster and could wield a veritable scourge. Also, I set it down as a fact that men with soldiers’ jaws are not rocks in a desert land or even the shadow of a rock, where a young baby is concerned. And my poor Nan had been feeding her imagination, not on poetry, but germs! — The new technique in the care of infants, applied with all the rigor and thoroughness of her race.

It was the oddest, most unexpected yet character-

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istic, tragic-comical change in Nanny Aylesford — those blue ecstatic eyes fixed on sterilization ! I could have wept — I did laugh with horrid mirth — at the discussions that went on, wasting precious moments between mother and daughter, who had needed each other so long and soon must part again. Those moments would rise in memory. I who had lost my mother quaked to hear Nanny argue wretchedly with hers and tease her with questions framed with too much care to avoid offense where there could be nothing but offense — if not to Mrs. Aylesford, to the pride and susceptibilities of old, faithful servants in the house.

“My dear Nanny,” Mrs. Aylesford would cry with a bored, half-querulous smile, “milking-things that have been washed and scoured and set in the sun do *not* need to be scalded over again the minute before they are used. And where is the boiling water to come from at half-past five in the morning when Jonas comes for the pails? Do you expect Mary to get up at four?”

“But, mother, dear ! some milk-pails have covers. Even our air holds dust, and flies —”

“Flies, Nanny ! I’d like you to show me *a* fly in Mary Martin’s milk-cellar ! I do hate to say it — but Mary was so happy when she heard you were coming home, and yesterday I found her crying — and angry too ! — because you insist that boiling water must be poured over dishes she has washed herself and taken out of the china-closet, before they are fit to put the baby’s food in. Mary ! — who weaned you

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when I had rheumatic fever. I don't know what would have become of me—I guess I should n't be living—if I had been as distrustful of everything and everybody—”

“Oh mother, mother!” Nanny did not weep—she blushed as from a blow. No one could have laughed now. Of course she knew the gracelessness of her attitude, assuming to educate the house where she was born, where she was now a guest, with the excruciating power to wound that love gives. But the poor young hunted thing persevered with an inflexibility that showed the stock she came from, and with conviction equal to what she deemed she had at stake.

When I heard her say to Jonas on one of those fair May evenings, “I'm coming up to see you milk to-night, Jonas,” I knew the old chore-man was flattering himself. He thought it was for old times' sake, and his leathern features showed how deep his dumb pleasure was in the conceit. As they rounded the cow-barn by way of the lane to save Nanny's white shoes from litter of the cow-yard, he glanced up smiling at the long-backed roof which came down to within a child's climb of the ground. He thought of the times he had warned her off that steep slide with a voice made stern on purpose. She had loved to creep up on hands and knees to the high peak and lie there with her chin over, thrilled to look down into the cow-yard below. He fancied she was thinking of those days. Her next words undeceived him.

“Jonas, I know you always wash your hands before you milk,”—she could n't remember having

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seen him do anything of the kind, — “but would you mind if I give you a sort of smock — something like a coat, white drilling, so it can be washed — to wear over your working-clothes? It’s done, you know, when people are particular as we are” (cunning Nanny!). “Of course I will see to the washing. And I have got you some cheese-cloth towels — for the cows, you know?”

“What am I to do with the cows?” drawled Jonas dully and harshly. “Wash ’em and put night-gowns on them, too?” He had heard from Mary a disgusted account of these new notions that were upsetting the house, and now he saw it was his turn; this evening walk for old times’ sake had been a visit of inspection. It hurt very much and it came near ending Jonas’s long service in the family. He said if she was n’t satisfied with his way of milking, she had better bring on some of her cowboys to do it, if that was the way out West. He was too old to learn new tricks.

Nanny told me all this herself with perfect breadth and humor and almost tears for Jonas, and she laughed when she came to the sequel, her father’s request that she leave outside matters alone! She could quite see his side, and her mother’s; but she knew she was right, and it was her child! I wondered how she could ever be rested. Even here, the safest place on earth, it would seem, peace could not be hers — never perhaps again. She was always just a trifle *not there*, when we talked and I would try to revive the spirit of our old enthusiasms. And certain little matters of my own that could not have been

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written, but had waited for our first reunion, to confide to her alone, were left unsaid. We could not even read together as we used — but we could look at little Phœbe. Here was the key to Nanny's concentration. Her mother-soul relaxed its fears, her whole heart smiled when Phœbe lay sleeping in her carriage out of doors and we two sat and gazed at her. It was a new bond, but it was the strongest one now left between us, and it did not have to be forced on my side. I was never tired of looking in that little face and studying its unfamiliar expressions; — Nanny's child with so little of Nanny that I could see in her. An exquisite accident, was it? — or a combination beyond the reach of accident?

Mrs. Aylesford had found a nurse-girl, such as the neighborhood afforded, for Nanny, to save sheer mowing and toiling. I was sure this little nursemaid was being watched — not with the eye of a hawk nor a hen, but a young mother's eye, wan and a trifle wild at times. My Nanny, as I remember, had rather a hunted look in those days. I had seen Essie with her baby problems and now I saw Nanny who took hers so differently, with such passionate submergence, and so little of Essie's almost masculine humor and philosophy. The babies, so far as I could see, were doing about equally well, and I wondered which of the mothers in the long run would pay the highest price for her own experience. It was easy to see there must be a price for anything as precious as that little Phœbe. It was the most remarkable reproduction of the hawk-eye with all the predatoriness left out, and

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with a mouth so sweet that it set one guessing what, as to a mouth, the Maclay mustache concealed under its close-fitting curves.

The little side-road below the mill was now the favorite baby-carriage promenade. Here on certain mornings Nanny and I used to pace up and down, I at her side silent or reading, while she wheeled the baby slowly to sleep, sometimes softly singing as she walked. The nursemaid would be doing her bits of baby washing which her aunt, Mary Martin, said she "had a right to do," a way of enforcing the idea that it was part of her legitimate work. It was Mary's pride that one of her own blood should not shirk in this her first "situation" which Mary had procured for her. When the baby slept we would seat ourselves on our talking-stones under the willows by the wall with the baby carriage near us, its back to the breeze. Nanny would relax and a different look come into her eyes, and she would bring out, chapter by chapter, passages of her life in absence which she had glossed over or purposely omitted in writing to me. Yet always with that slight veil between us — her weariness, or wifely abstraction. I tried to make allowance for a man in the back of her thoughts, a man I had never seen. . . . And here we had the conversation which made this visit memorable and begins my story, or that part of Nanny's story which I call mine.

Her husband I knew had business like any ordinary mortal: he owned in part and managed wholly certain mines near a mountain town called Silver

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City, though the mines were gold mines. I had persistently thought of Nanny among these mountains in spite of the fact that Silver City was not the address on her letters. But snow-capped distances between places "out West" mean nothing to a New Yorker across the continent. I had ventured that morning to tease her a little with my romantic theory of her wooing and evanishment; I even called her captor the Black Douglas, with whom they threatened Lowland babies, as we read in "Tales of a Grandfather." She laughed a little; she was not displeased. So, I thought, if any of it is true, it is true in a way that does not hurt.

"He can't help his name, you know. It's his mother's maiden name. There are hundreds of Douglasses in British Columbia where she came from. And he's not such a 'black' character — he's quite a protector in his way. *I* feel safe with him!"

"Which also goes with the feudal idea," I said.

"Feudal!" she laughed. "You don't know the country!" As we seemed to be talking at cross-purposes, she presently changed the subject.

"You know we live — or *I* live — now, in a most ordinary fashion. We have given up our dream of a house on the mesa."

The "mesa?" Either I had missed one of her letters or I had forgotten inexcusably. I was silent, waiting for my cue.

"I must have written you about our land out on the mesa? The 'Doldrums,' we called it, because we were pretty much becalmed there, waiting for our

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water. It was to have come from an irrigation scheme that Douglas had great faith in, or of course he would n't have spent so much money preparing our land. We had a desert-claim and a timber-culture and a homestead under it, and a house! To hold down a homestead claim you have to swear to continued residence there for the time the law requires. Where a man has his washing done is one definition, I believe, of his home. Douglas left his washing when he came down."

Nanny laughed ; but I exclaimed : "Why Nanny, I never heard of that! Did you live there, alone?"

"Oh, dear! I had plenty of people. The plough teams had their camp below the bluff. There were men building wire-fence and putting up the windmill. There were others grading in front of the house for our lawn—raising a horrible dust. Dick Grant was there off and on ; he had charge of the work on all the claims—carrying water to the trees we had planted to be ready for the canal when it came ; otherwise we should have lost a year. We had fifty acres of wheat in one field below the mesa. Oh, there was a lot of work! I have never seen so much work done on land in so short a time—I used to wish father could be there to watch it: not afterwards, though. The canal was down to within two miles of us; the dust from the scraper teams was in plain sight from our house. Some of it occasionally blew over us! Then there was trouble with the financial end of things; nobody was paid—the contractors took the work as far as it was done, on a 'lien,' and

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the company subsided for a time. It meant months of waiting—perhaps years, and we could n't wait. We had shot our bolt. We were done. Everything 'died on us' as Mary says when she has bad luck with her young turkeys in wet weather. Nothing was wet with us. Dry, dry!—acres of baby trees; the little poplars we had planted by the house that had come out in leaf,—our half-mile of them, between the wheat-fields, to the gate. Such a lovely drive it would have been, after the brown valley between us and town! Then our house on the bluff with its spire of poplars, and the land going back as you climbed, and last of all the mountain-line—the Owyhees. Such a home! . . . It was not to be," she ended quietly. "We saw our leaves turn yellow in April; every tree died as soon as the May winds began to blow. There was no rain that spring and even the wheat that had sprouted, our faith crop, died."

"But that was tragedy!—no; you never wrote me anything of this."

"Well; I was rather worn out with it: perhaps I did n't write. One would have to be there to know what it means—what it meant to the man who did it all and saw it fail. He did it for me—because I don't like to live in little towns. So you can imagine I was n't very proud of it. And now he has to be busier than ever at the mines, and I live in a square white house on a corner lot in Boisé City. There is nothing interesting about it except that it was built by a Catholic priest who died there much loved, and it's called the 'Father Lanfrey house.'"

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"But tell me about this Boisé City? How far is it from your mesa and your mines?"

Nanny answered categorically, "Three miles from the mesa and sixty from the mines. That is rather far for one's husband, but there is no place for me up there—with a baby. I should n't feel safe. And Boisé is the purchasing center for the mines. So we live—and move—and have our sort of being. You see I thrive on it!"

Ah, do you? I thought.

"It sounds surprisingly real even to me, as you tell it. I see why your Protector of the Poor must need that kind of an eye and that soldier's jaw I've been accusing him of, if that's the sort of thing he's out there to put through."

"I did n't say he's a 'Protector of the Poor,' he's a protector of me," Nanny laughed. "And his things don't always go through. But he stands it: his 'jaw,' does that much for him. When he comes home with a certain fixed look of rather more than usual cheerfulness, I expect to hear after awhile that he's had a blow of some kind. He never tells me at once—not till he's shown me that it does n't matter. The one thing I do need and that he can't give me," Nanny went on rapidly forestalling my tacit sympathy, "is an angel woman of some kind whom I could love a little and trust a good deal, who would love my little Phœbe and not spoil her and do crazy things to her behind my back. Then I should be free to take breath now and then. I could go with Douglas when he wants me on his trips. Sometimes he goes to ex-

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amine mines and I don't see him, and hardly hear from him, in some of the places, for weeks. I could go anywhere — but not if I have to leave Phœbe. I see no prospect of any change — seeing any more of each other — for years, unless this angel were raised up for us. I suppose there are such persons as highly recommended governesses. I have thought of writing to Mrs. Young-Fulton. But it would bring gray hairs choosing among a list of strangers, and our life would be a severe test for an Eastern girl. It might not be a relief — only an added strain."

Nanny's own voice sounded so strained as she said this that involuntarily I turned to look at her. She looked at me and blushed because I had seen tears in her eyes. Neither of us spoke for a moment. A vision of something which might happen in the future — my own future that I had, for good reason, begun to think about — flashed into my mind ; something rather calculating in one way, but it sank very sweetly into my heart. A vision seen through Nanny's tears could not be all of self.

"I'm very much intrigued with your Boisé City and your mesa and your mines," I began rather heavily approaching my scheme. "These are places like none that I have ever seen or ever shall see, unless you'll let me come out there some day — if it should turn out just right for both of us? Do you think you could 'love *me* a little' and trust me a little — after I had learned things? I should have to learn a good deal. But one thing I should n't have to learn — to love this little Phœbe!" I kept my face

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away from Nanny, looking at the sleeping child. I dared not meet her eyes after what I had said. But when I did she gazed at me a moment — then her head sank between her hands.

“Edith, Edith ! Don’t tempt me, dear, unless you mean it !”

My heart gave an answering sob. Heaven knows — I could not have told her — what a wrench it meant in my own life, that proposal ! She was quiet, and then we were both laughing.

“You — in Boisé City ! You ’d say anything to make me happy.” (She pronounced it “Boý-see.”)

“I don’t mean now, of course.”

“You simply mean you ’d like to ? — only it can never be.”

“No ; I mean a good deal more than that. It might surely be, so far as I ’m concerned. But it would have to be right for several other people — and it’s long, sometimes, before every thing is all right for everybody. A time might come — one has to think of the future, with a dear father who never thinks of anything but the present. And who is n’t very well.”

“I know,” Nanny sighed. “But your father is years younger than mine ; my father is seventy-two.”

“My father will never be an old man,” I answered. “There has been an examination — certain rules must be kept from now on. They won’t be. That is all.”

“Yes ; I can imagine !” Nanny cried. “To sit by

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helpless and watch a life you love being steadily mistreated — shortened — ! I suppose it is diet ? ”

“ Yes, it is diet, hang it ! How I hate the human liver ! ”

“ It behaves — if you take it young and give it a chance. But even when you do, and it’s your own child absolutely in your own hands, you can hardly keep the rules — and keep anything else ! Look at me with my dear family ! How lovingly they fight against me, how skeptical they are. And they are rather above the average in this place, not exceptionally prejudiced. They bear with me because I am their child. Then take a town like Boisé and persons who are not above the average even there, who have never heard of you or your rules, and imagine what they think of me when I try to make them — not understand, but simply keep those rules ! I don’t try. I trust no one — and yet I have to trust — all the ones I cannot see. Sometimes I wish my eyes had never been opened ! ”

“ Who opened them, dear ? ”

“ An army doctor at the Post — Boisé Barracks. They are very good — this one better than most, a real student. When it’s done it’s done. You can’t shut your eyes to your own child. My fear is getting ill myself and having no one to leave Phœbe to but those women who go out to nurse ; I don’t call them nurses.”

“ Ah, Nanny ; you have lived a great deal since we sat here last — and talked of such different things ! Silly chits that we were.”

“ No, no ; it was the dearest time — the time of my

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whole life I could not spare! Out West, I've gone round and round like a straw in an eddy. That is n't the West, though, —it's only me. But I'm learning. Phœbe has never had a sick day in her — oh, I must not boast! Come! let's talk about you. I've been going to ask — do you leave marriage out of your future altogether? Who knows but you may pop off some day as your sister did, before any one can say 'boo'!"

"It will be 'boo to a goose,' indeed, if ever I go off as Essie did. Not that you could blame her if you knew Jack. But she was in her 'teens.'"

"Are the twenties so much safer?"

"My twenties are. And I'm rather a cynic about genius in a husband. They're all about our path, you know. Strong, simple men don't come my way so much — nothing simple ever does! It would be such a rest to have just one thing to do — a straight-ahead job of *that* kind—" We were both gazing at Nanny's child.

She put her arm around me. "If it *could* be you — out there with us! I shouldn't be thinking only of the times when I could run off and play."

"That word 'us' holds the chief difficulty," I reminded her. "Your husband might find a stranger less of a nuisance on the whole."

"No: you two would get on in your offish fashion. If you like strong and simple men, there you are! You would never like him less than you did at first — which might not be much — and he would accept you as if he had known you all his life. He might be a

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little afraid of you till he saw you, but he would n't miss the point—not one thing about you would escape him. And with you around, he'd see a side of me—that he's never seen before!" She looked a little startled after saying this. "You know," she added, "I never talk to any one as I do to you!"

"As you did," I corrected.

"As I shall again. But I should n't care for—well, I don't much like talking men, though your father would bowl any one over! My man does n't talk about what he's going to do, and he does n't talk about what he has done, and when he has tried and failed, it's not worth while to talk about that either. Theories of life he leaves alone. Art he knows nothing about. He reads a great deal, technical books—he hardly has time for much else—and the papers. So you see if silence is restful, I have a good deal of it. You would rest me in another way. Did you ever hear such egotism!"

"But if this is to be serious, we must be sound on that very point—the three personalities in the case. And one other point. I shall never leave papa—while he is supposed to need me, however little I can do. By that time Phœbe will be a big girl for such lessons as I could give her."

"The very kind I want!" said Nanny. "I don't want one of Mrs. Young-Fulton's kind with a college diploma. I want—what little royalties have, a—lady of the realm. I shall reverse my dear parents' method with me. I don't want to anchor my child: I want to give her wings!"

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"Do you connect wings with 'little royalties'?" I laughed at her.

"I connect you — with everything I want for my Phœbe. If one could only have what one wants in this world without making some one else pay the price!"

"Only children, and then you pay the price!" I said.

And she added, "I suppose that's why they are such blessed things to have."

How she had been dwelling on and dreaming of these futures, — the mother of little Phœbe, one year old! "I'm dying to have you see it all, to see how you will take it. Just as you used to say you'd love to take me abroad."

"Suppose you had gone with us to Normandy that summer when you did this? It was the closest shave you ever had in your life!"

"I can't imagine it. I can't think of myself, see myself anywhere or anyhow but just as I am. My cares look like tragedies, perhaps, when I pour them all out like a baby this way, but I like my cares better than I should like being careless now. I even long sometimes to be back there — the place itself haunts me, much as I have thought I hated it. You will see! If you ever see those desert plains, night and morning, day after day — you'll know what I mean."

Nanny sat silent a while longer with her cheek on her hand musing, I thought, rather happily, and I was happy thinking I had had something to do with her peaceful face. The baby began to stir in her car-

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riage and Nanny jogged it a little and looked at her watch.

"Well, honey," she said, rising as we saw the nursemaid coming towards us, "there is one thing I think this will do for you. Give you a rest from all the egotists except me, and all the Talk except Mine. And it's a great place for continuity. You can keep on with one train of thought a very long time."

"How strange to say 'can' and 'will' instead of 'might' — and not an hour ago we had neither of us thought of such a thing!" said I.

"Oh, I had!" Nanny blushed. "But I do think I am treating Phœbe as if she were a little crown princess, asking you to be her governess!"

"But you did n't! I asked first, remember. On my own head be it."

We agreed for obvious reasons not to speak of our plan in its present vagueness, even to Nanny's mother, though Nanny was good enough to say it would make her very happy. I could see it had made my dear girl if not happier more rested — more let down. Sometimes she would sigh softly to herself with a little smile and look at me as if we had a very warm secret between us.

III

How should it ever have entered my calculations that anything but death, his death or mine, would have parted me from my father? Yet we parted, and he did it. It was done in a word—as he might have kissed me good-night and gone to a play and left me at home alone, for that evening only. That was his way of treating a grave decision when it was forced upon him.

Four years had passed since that May visit and my talks with Nanny under the Aylesford willows. She had not been home in the interval nor had I gone up there again. My little pupil in the West must be a ripe age, I thought, for such lessons as I could give her. As time passed I had felt less sure of myself as to that wild proposition, less able to count on my nerves—but that was for reasons not connected with time. I was only twenty-seven.

The picture-market was at a low ebb, even for us, that winter. On the other hand, our family had increased by one *exigeant* member. He was an old political chum of papa's; they had called each other "brothers in Mazzini" in the great days of United Italy. Papa was in England at the time—I forget what the family were doing over there; but he was young—as the captain was. Some people are spoiled by prosperity and some by adversity: Captain Nashe

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had been spoiled by both, and still he was a rather captivating person if you did not see too much of him. He turned up most inopportunately (I had just told our "general" that she must expect henceforth to do the table-linen; as she was a poor servant she submitted, but was feeling put upon) and his visits never were short.

The captain was an Englishman, but he did not claim to have held a commission in the British army; indeed his military title may have been a fiction, or a bit of sentiment. He had been one of Garibaldi's aides, and he used to boast of the kiss his hero chief had knelt to give him when his comrades left him, grievously wounded, on that desperate retreat through Central Italy, where he lay hid for weeks nursed by poor peasants while the Austrians were scouring the forests of Ravenna. That would have been in '49. He was out again with the Red Shirts in '59 and '60. Papa had known him all those years and had been in the habit of helping him out in his periods of scarcity when one cannot live on gallant memories; he said he was a beautiful fellow in his youth, one of the handsomest of Englishmen. No doubt he had suffered and made sacrifices, and no doubt he did love Italy. Tears would fill his eyes when he read aloud to us:—

" 'Each of the heroes around us has fought for his land and line,
But *thou* hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong not
thine! ' "

We little girls, listening, thought it scarcely seemed quite modest, but the captain did not pretend in that

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way. He bragged of his adventures openly. What was there better worth talking about in the trumpery city of New York, in our studio-existence which he patronized grandly! As for the poems he favored us with, seldom waiting to be asked, he certainly could read in his way magnificently. Also he could sing, in a fine rolling barytone without much cultivation. Sea-chanteys and soldier-choruses, and the wild Hungarian folk-songs that were little known then on this side, while papa, who played in a manner as magnetic as the captain's singing, woke imaginary drum-beats or hoof-beats as the song called for, in big male chords on the piano.

The piano was upstairs in the studio and behind it stood a life-sized lay-figure in Roman draperies with perhaps a casual hat of papa's dropped on its bald wooden pate. Whoever moved it often left it in grotesque attitudes. Papa, who used it, never could see how funny the lay-figure could be! We little girls one evening disgraced ourselves, much as we loved the music, by falling into smothered shrieks of giggles over the tableau they three made: the captain singing in great form, erect behind papa at the piano, neither of them aware of the lay-figure in the corner, apparently in contortions of agony, throwing up its hands for help.

We had our own reasons for disliking the captain — reasons such as children do not tell. As young girls we were quick to see the added look of care his visits brought to our mother's face. It was unfortunate that papa's clothes fitted him. If there were

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any choice between two suits (of papa's) his brother in Mazzini would presently be seen wearing the smarter one. He gave up pipes when he came to us and smoked papa's best cigars remarking plaintively that he could n't afford "cheroots" of that brand himself. Neither could papa! We girls knew that we could have no new frocks when the captain dropped down on us. On this visit, the dishes he particularly liked were those papa was now forbidden to touch; he asked for them at table, before papa, if they were omitted from our necessarily restricted menus. He criticized the wine which his host selected and was forbidden to touch, but with the captain's rallying eye upon him and the glass of friendship raised, too often my dear daddy would give in. On these occasions I may say that I hated the captain.

On his arrival that autumn, about the time we were getting our coal in and groaning at the bill, Essie came over promptly to hold an indignation meeting. We scolded and vowed what should and must be done, and then we fell a-laughing over the wild absurdity of fleas as small financially as we were having lesser fleas to bite them. The idea of papa supporting that magnificent and debonair figure of a man — but the whole absurdity became tragic when it involved papa's health and his defiance of all rules. The captain was like a naughty boy who fears no rod of discipline at home, seducing another along the path that leads to a thrashing. He had no reason to dread consequences, for he left them to others to take. His own family, he complained, had turned him off

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for nothing but his principles — his incorrigible activities in shipping arms and men from England during the glorious wars. In my opinion he cared no more for the principle of Italian independence than he did for the Pope's toe.

Our relatives in the city looked on with disgust at papa's gullibility. I don't think he was wholly deceived, but criticism of a guest and a penniless guest he would not tolerate, and when he was finally taken aside by his sister, — the nicest aunt we had! — and told that the captain was not a proper person to be domesticated in the house with two unchaperoned girls (this was before Essie's marriage), he took such serious umbrage that it caused a definite breach. And this, too, we laid to the captain. We needed Aunt Essie — she had not always been very comprehending, but was invariably kind. We did not care very much for the old ball-gowns she gave us, nor for her state dinners, especially when she did not send her carriage for us; but we liked *her* tremendously. Rich relatives, as Essie said, are needed in a family like ours brought up to despise wealth. . . . I shall not go into the reasons why, as we grew older, Essie and I knew that the relatives were right, and that the captain ought to have been turned out of our studio-nest without mercy and long before the winter when he came and egregiously lived on us.

With no picture-sales worth mentioning and his ancient comrade on his back, papa was forced to stoop to black-and-white. He took orders for that thing he ridiculed, a "gift-book," and he made illus-

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trations for magazine-stories which he felt it an affliction to read. Sometimes he barely did read them and drove the authors wild with the liberties he took in his interpretations of their text. Once he drew a British naval officer with a mustache. When I laughed at him, he said, "How should *I* know the fellow was in the navy?" I pointed out that if he had read the story he'd have known, that fact being the crux of the whole tale. He considered himself meanly paid for all these botherations. The captain, with not very convincing disinterestedness, supported the idea.

"Pot-boilers are all right, my dear Bonny, if they boil the pot!" And he would counsel me not to feed my father's sacrifices to his family on such tough corned-beef as we had had — say on Saturday. "Give it to the poor, my dear, give it to the poor! I have noticed the meat on your father's table is not what it used to be in your mother's time, my dear Edith. You should go to the stalls yourself with your maid, and try the effect of your *beaux yeux*. Of course no young lady nowadays can tell one cut from another. You must either charm your tradesmen —"

"Or pay them," I supplied.

He was seated as he said this, eating his eleven o'clock breakfast alone by the studio-fire. It was Monday morning; he had declined to take it in the dining-room which he said was cold and smelled of wash-boilers. Papa was drawing me for one of his illustrations, in my best ball-gown. Without the ball I found it chilly, especially as the captain in a great armchair kept all the fire to himself. He turned clean

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round to say these things to me about the meat on our table, his face flushed with the heat he was monopolizing.

"I shall give it to the poor, certainly," I retorted. "We shall have it ourselves to-day for luncheon."

"Then pray spare us a few poached eggs on top!" the captain begged. "Do you know,"—he gazed pensively at his plate,— "I believe this bacon has been standing."

"I think it very likely," I laughed rudely. "On Monday mornings—if we must go into details—it is not an easy matter in this house to keep a broiling-fire —"

"—It's not broiled, it's fried," the captain retorted.

Papa smiled at our bleak jesting, with a stern eye on my pose.

"If you could be down at the breakfast-hour, captain, your bacon would suit you better. And your coffee—that's been standing too, I suppose?"

"It has," said the captain meekly, "but I refrained from mentioning it knowing how sensitive my young hostess is to the comfort of her father's guest."

"Come, that's too bad!" Papa sprang up. "Stale coffee is vile." He squeezed the water out of his brush—he was laying in the shadows on my skirt in sepia and the folds must not be stirred—and he kept me there without moving while he set out the Russian coffee-pot and called downstairs for the canister and settled the captain watching his own coffee boil. I boiled already! One of my arms was getting stiff holding up a curtain which also had folds that

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must not be changed. This was all in the day's work for papa, but I saw no reason why I should ache and freeze for the captain, if he chose to lie abed and growl about his bacon. I had become as small as that! These were my nerves that winter.

I told the captain I hoped that his cup of coffee might tantalize him in a place where he would n't require it hot. He had now got as much of the fire as he could stand and he backed his chair away and turned and stared at me deliberately. Not as the little artist-brethren stared and sighed and groaned when Essie and I were posing; we only laughed at them. They saw not us, but their own unapproachable ideal that we momentarily suggested. The captain's eye was not impersonal. It was moist and foolish, as when (as little girls) he used to try to make us kiss him good-night and papa always supported our fierce objections.

"Ye gods, Bonny! What a mercy this child of yours is a bit of a vixen. If she were kind, now! Look at that eye over her shoulder—conceive if it should melt! Where would the poor wretch be she cast it on!" And he quoted, still staring and speaking under his breath, so that papa working diligently on shadows did not hear him:—

"Not a drop of her blood was human,
Yet she was made like a soft, sweet woman."

He knew that I knew what the words were from: not two nights before, the captain had picked up Rossetti and offered to read "Eden Bower" to papa

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and me, and I had taken my sewing and gone off to a corner of my own. Whom you can and cannot read certain poems with is as much a test of the person as of the poem. Papa would have felt these distinctions in a different mood, or if the captain had been a rich relative instead of a shabby old friend going very fast downhill.

It seems paltry to speak of such low little incidents now after all the softening years. I only wish to bring out why my nerves were not in the best state, any more than papa's were, for the decision close upon us that winter, when circumstances pushed us so near the edge.

The captain, I think, felt my contempt for his presence in the house and made it his excuse for these insolences; my manner to him was excuse enough too, I dare say. He was getting ready to take his revenge whenever an opportunity should present itself.

IV

IT came to our door, one evening, in the guise of good-fortune and in the words of a friend, who brought us the first news of papa's selection for a magnificent order, and said he had had nothing to do with it. But as he was one of the critics whom new-made millionaires consulted on important art purchases, we doubted his disclaimer.

A great palatial house was going up that winter which had been the talk of the city. It was making the opportunity of more than one of papa's artist-friends. He had heard of their luck and perhaps silently envied them—I know I had. And now papa was to have the crowning chance of all: the wall-frescoes for the great ballroom. The ceiling and doors and cornices and the panels that held the magnificent sconces had been ordered from abroad; many famous names were combined for the setting of that series which would be papa's highest bid for fame.

He took his good-fortune with calmness, almost with condescension. Not so the captain who seemed to visibly swell and burgeon in the light of vicarious prosperity. He quite fawned on "Bonny," whose replenished pockets he saw leaking into his own which were fathomless. The unhappy illustrations were cast aside. I myself had the presumption, and perhaps the dishonesty, to finish a frontispiece which

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a friendly House had been waiting for — but not in silence — needed at once for the next issue of their magazine. It was a case of bad faith either way. Papa's drawing was singularly unequal and when he felt lazy and indifferent, as in this case, it could be extremely bad: though he would always have some clever theory on the spur of the moment to account for its vagaries. Fatuous as it sounds, it is a fact that my patching-in was never noticed! Another drawing I sent off without consulting him. He had done all he ever would to it; it was charming. He had got just what he wanted and it behooved some one to snatch it from him before he should spoil it with tired fussing.

For two days he was lost to existence — going back over his old sketches, laying them silently one by one aside with a steadily gathering gloom. If the captain interrupted him during this absorbed scrutiny he shut him up sharply or paid no attention. The captain would smile serenely and stroll off content to wait. The spring was heading up that was to fill the distributary channels. I saw there would be a heavy price to pay for this sudden rise in our prospects. If it had not happened, our incubus would soon, I think, have slipped from us. The captain was not over-comfortable, and he never liked to share short commons.

Suddenly, after a week of this intense saturation with his subject, papa announced that he had got it. *It* had come! But it wasn't here — and he had nothing to fit it in any of his old stuff. He must go where the vision called him. And then my heart

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went down like lead ; for I saw in the captain's gloating eye, as papa unrolled his plan, that he meant to get himself included in that search for the Ideal, and to that pair I could not make a third. But there would be something of a struggle first.

"It" was a memory going back to papa's young days when he had been a wanderer with means and health, and other things that he had not now. There was a mountain, he said, that you saw across a lagoon, palm-fringed, — the inner, land-locked harbor of an island in the South Pacific. The breakers roared outside, but all was still where you looked eastward to the mountain, and the light must be the shadowless light after sunset with the "feeling" of a new moon behind one in the west. And the people, in that ballroom, circling down the floor would pause in their dance in front of this scene filling the end-wall, opening into another hemisphere, and giving the color-key he wanted. Dancers then were not draped like figures on a Greek vase, they did not sway and side-step — they chased the hours on flying feet and their wide silk skirts swirled out — rapturously, as we thought ! But the spirit of papa's dream was far back or far ahead of his time. The scenes on the walls his dancers were to pass with over-shoulder glances, or fan themselves in front of, were all in places with soft-voweled names, between the lights ; loiterers on forest-paths where you almost smelled the heavy-scented flowers languid in the gloom, or dancers by the light of beach-fires, in and out of the shadows, flower-crowned dancers brown and bacchanal. . . .

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To me it was sickening. I felt in it a sick man's fancy, a desperate need to realize for the last time what for him was over-past. With papa alone I could have followed the fatuous but compelling dream. I knew how he must have longed to get out of New York that winter ; but with Captain Nashe of the party, Tahiti would be another "Eden Bower" to me. There was a business side also in which papa needed his "vixen." He would work his idea over and over—changing his scheme, and the days would drift that brought him no nearer to keeping his contract with these people who would be waiting for their ballroom. He remembered those alluring places as they had welcomed him long ago to their feasts and flower-crowned dances, and the plunge from white beaches into the moonlit surf it would give him a chill now to think of. There would be nothing sane or comfortable or even safe for an elderly gentleman under a doctor's orders. And he would draw on his price in advance, a large bite out of the cake he had not earned.

All papa's best friends tried to dissuade him from this mad journey, but they handled him like the fine porcelain he was — and becoming almost as fragile. It was quite in vain. He was as feverish as a gambler to get back to the tables, and the captain stood always at his elbow urging him to put his money on the game. Nothing could suit *him* better than to leave for San Francisco and the tropics just as our February rains begin.

I cannot endure the memories of those days that

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preceded our parting ; they were so unworthy of what was to come. Papa's excitability, his peremptoriness, his peevishness with me. He actually quarreled with me over the way I wore my hair, though I had worn it so all winter. Girls then balled their hair up into a chignon at the back and chopped it off in front into bangs. Papa suddenly insisted that my chignon looked "stuffed" (as they frequently were) or as if I had bought it and pinned it on. It must show that it was hand-made of my own hair, fresh that evening — or morning, as the case might be. And he declared I had been at my front hair with scissors. He was really funny ! It was impossible to discuss anything with him, even necessary plans that concerned myself alone. Wretched as it was to have such plans, it was worse with the captain standing by in secret glee at our stupid wrangling. I dare say papa had me somewhat on his conscience, besides feeling ill and dreading the journey : no wonder I made him nervous. He would be constantly arguing, with no one now to oppose him, that it was n't a woman's trip ; no girl of my age could help him in the conditions he would be amidst. A man who had knocked about the world like the captain was the ideal companion he needed. And all had been arranged for me in his absence by simply depriving me of my home. He had proposed to one of our artist-friends with a wife and family to take the house, on very friendly terms as to rent — they could not have done it otherwise. It would just suit their circumstances, and I of course would live with Essie ! Thus he disposed of me for an

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indefinite time, but with a perfectly definite sum to live upon (if I could collect it), the rent of the house, after certain repairs had been paid for and our two months' bills in arrears. I saw myself going to brother-in-law Jack for car-fares.

V

ESSIE and I have always got on together. I shall not deny that I am hasty at times, but Essie is cool enough to make up. Whether her feelings are better tempered than mine or not as strong, does not alter the fact that she has them under more uniform control. She does not rise to a great occasion in a manner to satisfy a demand for warm partisanship; she can be satirical but she is always civil, even to persons she dislikes. Few things could surprise her after the sensations her marriage with Jack Landreth must have supplied, but I certainly surprised her that morning, when I walked in with the news that papa was going to Tahiti with Captain Nashe, that our house was let over my head, and that papa's sole inspiration for me in his absence had been the assumption that I could live with them indefinitely as a non-paying guest.

Essie smiled, but without irony, bless her! It was one of the moments which decide whether one's sister is a lady or is not. She met my eyes serenely and with no apparent speculation in her own, though her housewife's brain must have been busy behind the sisterly smile. Sisterly! It was queenly! It was like the manner of a statesman at some diplomatic crisis. Her mind was not revealed: her response was perfect.

"I know how you must feel," she said, "but we

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always understand each other. If we don't understand papa, that's an old bond too. Of course he gets more mysterious as he gets older. I hope he is n't counting on storing any of his pictures here. I have never been able to impress on him the size of this flat. I don't need to tell you which your room is, dear. Of course it is n't empty. I shall put my nurse in the cook's room. The cook will probably leave—"

We burst into wild laughter, Essie perfectly impersonal, and I arose and kissed her which discomposed us both a little. And then we talked with fewer precautions, Essie frankly with a considering eye upon future stowing; a sister and sister's clothes and possibly a wagon-load of papa's pictures, heaped upon her in her cramped quarters. I believe she was a good manager with ~~what~~ she had to manage with; she went through some masterly processes of elimination. Me she could not eliminate, but I proposed to help a little towards that end myself.

"I'll come to you till papa's back is turned. I'll leave my clothes here, and my address: that will satisfy papa. But I'm going up to see Mrs. Aylesford as soon as I know if she can have me." And I told her my plan. I could not, of course, hurl myself upon Nanny as I had been cast upon a sister's charity, but Mrs. Aylesford would be able to advise me from both points of view. I had not heard from Nanny in some time; her mother though would be in touch with the situation "out West." I said it rather quakingly.

"You know," Essie said, "it's horrid to have you

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cut loose in this way ; really shoved off the raft. Let's keep afloat all together or sink together. The captain has pushed you off. Jack knows things about him that papa ought to know. He's a perfectly unclubable person."

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't attack the captain to papa! That's been done too much already. I'm twenty-seven: it's high time I began to think for myself a little. Going out to Nanny doesn't call for great mental effort, especially as she thought of the plan first. I may feel yet that the captain has done me a good turn."

"He hasn't done me a good turn! I shall miss you dreadfully. And I'm jealous of Nanny—I've always been a little so. Now she will take you from me altogether."

"There are things I fear a good deal more than that," I said.

Essie knew and shared my forebodings.

"I think you are wasting a last chance not to tell papa, now. It might bring him to terms, you know. I'm sure it will give him a shock."

"Why should I want to give him a shock?"

"But I think you ought to tell him. It's not like you not to. I'm not sure that I shall aid and abet you in deceiving him at the last moment. Come, you will tell him?"

I said that I would. And perhaps Essie's "last chance" held some comfort for me too; I had had much the same idea, but had been afraid to trust it. Now I began to count upon telling him. It did not

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turn out as we had flattered ourselves. Papa inquired, when I spoke of my visit, why the Aylesfords should suddenly ask me up at this disagreeable season. I told him I had asked myself, and, as I expected, he demanded to know what induced me to do such an unusual thing. But when I explained my ultimate purpose in going up there and what I hoped it might lead to, he merely sat in silence. His face turned slightly red. He disliked having his plans upset (though they were my plans), also his authority called in question, to say nothing of his better judgment. His irritation I saw occupied his mind just then more than any pain I had counted on giving him. I was asserting myself in a manner he had not expected and would admit no reason for. He saw no room for pride as to Jack and Essie. If I did, why I must be over-proud.

"There is no room for *anything*, with Jack and Essie. There's no room for me, even if I left my pride behind."

He did not hold out his hand and say, "Then come with me!" and give me a chance to reply, "Not with the captain!" There was no reaction of this kind to the shock, if shock it were. Again he was silent, and I saw in his mobile face, in one swift, shirking glance of his eye that I knew every expression of, that he was glad to be rid of me—in this way, in any way.

I was wrong even to have thought of it as an issue between us! I, brought up in a studio, not to make allowance for the mood of creation! And the creator

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a sick man, his nervous strength passing from him. He was like one in the embrace of a powerful drug just beginning to sink into unconsciousness. Voices were distant to his ear. The demands of life came back only to tease him. I was his last human responsibility: he let me slip away and returned to his dream.

We parted on a drizzling morning, at the door of the carriage that waited to take him to his train. He had motioned the captain to enter before him; then we stepped back a little and he took my hands. I thought he looked ill and certainly sad. The face he bent down to me was pinched and blue and streaked with a color not of health. I think his eyes were smarting as he kissed me. I expected a word or two such as no one could say better—some little speech to remember. All he said was:—

“I hope they won’t freeze you up there on the Hudson. Don’t go skating on the river, alone, will you! February ice is not to be trusted.”

That was all: he spoke as if my visit were the only absence in question. He kissed the top of his cane to me from the cab-window. The captain sat uncovered and the last I saw of him he was bowing into his hat and smiling, vastly contented with himself.

VI

THEY put me in the northeast bedroom at the Aylesfords', and Mrs. Aylesford begged me in her eager manner of suppressed sympathy to keep myself "well wrapped up" while we made the passage of the cold halls. My suit-case had been left in the lower hall by Jonas with a glance at his muddy boots which might have meant an apology for not carrying it upstairs. There was no second maid and nothing was seen of Mary Martin at this hour, nor did Mary carry bags at any hour. It was their way to do things for themselves. Mrs. Aylesford and I had quite a tussle which should get possession of my hand-satchel and muff and a box of candy I had brought—they both loved it and denied themselves and each other the indulgence. I knew Mr. Aylesford would be up presently, with his beaming "Well, well!"—bringing my suit-case, when I should waylay him with my sweets, open at the top layer, all chocolates.

Dear Mrs. Aylesford ran ahead of me smiling—literally ran—up the stairs, wrapped in a shawl and bearing my muff and satchel both, having wrested them from me. There was the same impression of energy outlasting the demand for it, of a great goodwill confined in its manifestations, seeking to replace the natural outlets that love gives, and which life towards its close so often denies. They were not re-

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formers or interested very deeply in any Movement or Cause; and clubs, the resource of middle-aged mothers nowadays whose children do not need them actively, would not have been Mrs. Aylesford's refuge, I think, at any age.

I went straight to the window to look at my hills across the river. As I had seen them last, they were white with orchard-blooms and the dark points of cedars climbing up the gorges showed against them as if they were snow-banks. Now the orchards were all a mist of bare boughs and there was real snow in shrinking patches spoiling the soft purple outlines of the hills. The fireplace had been closed with a fire-board, a winter arrangement, and an air-tight stove roared in front of it. I asked what had become of the swallows' nests that used to line the big chimney, plastered to its sides near the top. One could not see them, but one knew they were there by the muffled twitterings, and a hollow sound of wings beating in the chimney as the parent birds flew in and out. It was a great feature of the room to me.

Mrs. Aylesford said the swallows had flown away last autumn, and she disposed of the matter practically by adding that the nests were burned out with straw every fall when the chimney was cleaned. "But the birds are all fledged and gone before summer is over."

I felt that I should miss the swallows, though just then a good hot fire might be more to the purpose. The carpet struck cold through one's very boot-soles, and the air beyond the stove's zone of heat was as

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fresh and pure as outside air and as icy. One knew that the room could not have been used all winter. It made me realize what the winters meant in that house since its spring-bird had flown.

"And now," said my hostess cozily, "will you have a cup of tea up here or in half an hour downstairs with us?"

"But you're having it for me! You don't take tea yourselves an hour before real tea! I have n't forgotten, you see, even if it is a good while."

"This afternoon we are going to have your kind of tea and 'real tea' a little later. You need a good substantial meal after your cold journey" (of two hours!).

"I need nothing but just what is here, just as it used to be. That's what I came for."

"Well, you'll have to give in to me a little this first afternoon; then we won't make company of you. Mary has baked some of the tea-cakes she remembered you liked; she'll want them eaten hot. And she remembered that you called them 'scones.'—In half an hour, then."

In half an hour I went down. Tea was served in the sitting-room next the dining-room. It had the afternoon sun and was too warm in summer at this hour. Now it was deliciously warm, and its stove-heated air smelled of rose-geranium and heliotrope, from blossoming plants brought in for the winter that filled a new bay-window; a change I deplored as I would any other alteration in any part of the old house, but Mrs. Aylesford, I could see, was very pleased with it.

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She seemed to me restless, though not disturbed about any one thing apparently. It was more like a chronic habit of waiting. She came up to my room on insufficient errands when I sat there writing letters of a morning—to see if Mary had brought fresh towels, and if they were the right ones; if I had had bed-covers enough in the night and a glass of milk on my tray in case I should not sleep. If it were bedtime, it was to see if my fire had been properly laid; and in the morning she knocked softly and stole in to see if it burned! I think it was having some one young in the house again that excited her, some one who made her think of Nanny. Gradually she became quieter, and especially when she found we had something to talk about that concerned Nanny herself.

My plan, or my hope, pleased her almost to tears. It was, of course, a great surprise; and she had a surprise for me—a rather startling one at first. Nanny was expecting a baby, very soon—"almost any day now." My proposal would come as the greatest possible relief just when her anxieties would center on little Phœbe left with servants. She only wished, she said, that Nanny could know it now. She urged me to telegraph, not to wait for an exchange of letters. I felt so sure that Mrs. Aylesford must know her ground that I did telegraph, being myself impatient, but I asked for a letter in return and said (in my telegram) that I should wait for the letter. But Nanny sent me a return telegram first.

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"You make me perfectly happy. Come soon. Letter goes to-day."

And we were happy, waiting for that letter: for a second telegram, signed "Douglas Maclay," had followed Nanny's — within twenty-four hours. The baby, "a fine little boy," had arrived and all was well. Mrs. Aylesford's relief was touching to see; it was the measure of her previous anxiety. She went back to her days of suspense and hugged the contrast.

I think she must have kept every letter Nanny had ever written her, from the winter at Cooper in New York, to the latest from Idaho. They were in the desk in the sitting-room where she had sat for hours writing her share of the weekly posts by which they had created a separate life for themselves in absence which spiritualizes our thoughts of those we love, as death does, and lifts our image of them above petty jars. I watched her sweet face and worn, drooped eyelids beneath her spectacles as she searched among her packets of letters, each clasped by a rubber band and labeled for the year they recorded. From the smallest bundle, since only January, she took one letter — the last she had received, but a few days before my arrival.

"I won't read it aloud," she said. "There's nothing in it Nanny would n't love to have you see. I like to read a letter myself: there's something in handwriting that shows you how the person felt at the time it was written. This shows, I guess, that Nanny was getting pretty tired of waiting. But you won't

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mind that, now ! It will tell you a little how they live — and how much she needs you.”

Nanny’s hand had changed more in this letter than in others I had had from her ; or not changed, exactly, — loosened up. In a few swift, intimate strokes I learned how those last days had passed ; how “well” she was, how far she could walk — as far as she dared go with only little Phœbe. How good Hing was (Hing had been with them on the mesa, Mrs. Aylesford explained) washing up blankets and cleaning the whole house. How Noreen, a young Irish housemaid, was learning to manage Phœbe, but was n’t very satisfactory ; rather dreamy and did n’t understand about outer clothing to suit changeable weather. Spring colds were what she dreaded. How Dick Grant slept at the house and kept his horse at their stable ready to ride with the summons to Silver City. “Douglas is getting things in shape up there so he will be able to stay awhile with us when he comes down, and he can keep an eye on Phœbe. He’ll want one eye, I expect, for some one else — some one I’m so impatient to see ! How strange it is to know nothing about them when they are so close to you all the time, I can hardly wait.”

We talked that evening long after Mr. Aylesford had gone to bed, and always about Nanny. I have n’t said how the whole hushed, empty house was eloquent of her to one who remembered it with her at home. . . . “Three times,” her mother said, “she has waited this way and gone through with it alone. I mean with no one belonging to her — no

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woman," she added in time, thinking of Nanny's husband.

I repeated the words in surprise — "Three times?"

"Yes; there might have been a baby between this one and Phœbe, but it did n't live. It never breathed. Yes; she's been through quite a good deal, for a girl that never had a real sickness nor a sorrow in her life."

There had been a heavy rainfall both before and after my visit began. One could walk nowhere on the roads for mud. The meadow was a swamp; the lanes up towards the barn and hill-orchards were lined with dingy snow-banks that wasted by day and froze at night. All the hedgerows, so sweet in summer, were sodden with dead leaves clinging to their blackened vines. The porches were not a good substitute for regular walks. The back porch was merely a stoop; the front one crossed the sitting-room windows where Mrs. Aylesford sat with her sewing and took pains to look up and smile each time as I passed on my beat. This was not very satisfactory. One day, the last of our waiting, I tried the baby-carriage walk under the willows by the mill. Passing the wheel-pit I stopped and looked down: it was cold as death down there. Rain had leaked into the buckets of the wheel and overflowed in icicles; the stones of the wall were cased in ice. I shivered and went on. Our willows were saffron-red through all their branching twigs, against the low, gray sky. The wet stones where Nanny and I had sat — everything here as well — here more than anywhere — spoke to me of her.

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Then Jonas came splashing by, the old horse in a hurry for his stable. I stepped into the road and took from him the afternoon mail from the North, by which Nanny's letters came. It was there at last. I opened it on my way to the house. Its first words were a cry of joy. My dear girl said such sweet things to me and about me that I could not hand my letter over, generous as her mother had been with her own, to me.

Inside the letter was pinned a check. It gave me the strangest feeling to have business with Nanny! Yet it would have been exceedingly awkward if she had not advanced my traveling expenses ("eh, what a fain'ly!"), in this check signed with her husband's name. I blushed at the amount. I was n't worth it — I should never be worth it in the world. I said so aloud.

"My dear, my dear!" Mrs. Aylesford cried. "I don't suppose even *I* know what you will be to Nanny! In all my married life I don't believe I've had so much sheer care as she has had in her six years. It's having people around whose minds don't work the same way as your mind does; whose ways are not the same. People's little ways! Yours will be such a rest. There won't be anything you don't understand. Father and I have been saying how natural it seems to have you here! You just seem to fit in every way, and you bring in so much that is fresh too. And we are just two old people."

"But, dear Mrs. Aylesford, there is always one side of Nanny's life that she and I can never touch upon.

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Much the greater half does n't belong to me any more."

"Oh, that side is all right, if you mean her husband. I can assure you of that. She's a happy wife — only she sees so little of him. You will help her to bear the times when she can't see him. That's the worst part of the whole strain, I expect." Mrs. Aylesford sighed. "It's wonderful to me how she stands it. No gold mines in the world would be worth it to me! But that's something she can't decide, I suppose. It would be like my wanting my husband to leave the old place here and go and live in New York, for instance."

I had often wondered what Nanny's parents really thought of her husband. In so far as they might be construed into an answer to that question, these remarks of Mrs. Aylesford's, simple and rambling as they were, pleased me very much.

There were a few sentences in that dear, foolish, wild scrawl of a letter which I could share with Nanny's mother.

"You'll find me in bed with what is called a 'monthly nurse' standing guard over me. She will think I ought to get up on the ninth day and be walking around the house soon after; that's the rule with her class of patients, otherwise you are considered lazy. I shall *be* lazy — with you taking care of my little Phœbe-bird. I want to be a tower of strength for the good times I see coming. 'Daddy' will be here, of course, and a daddy is a wonderful thing to have around, especially when so rare, but these daddies are

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not much account when it comes to wet grass and overshoes. We live by irrigation, yet I can't say it is n't the bane of my existence in some of its aspects. They seem to water the lawn whenever you don't know they are going to, and little folk get such deadly colds sitting on wet grass — There goes one of my worries ! I meant this letter to be all pure happiness, as it ought to be, but you see I'm obsessed. You're going to straighten out my nerves and make me sane again.

"I shall follow you all the way on your journey, beginning with those through-trains that used to go thundering past our crossing and give us just a hoot — and pack their smoke into the tunnel and burst out again with another 'hoo, hoo!' and round the last turn where the hills shut in. If you should start from our house, father would be pleased to death to see you off at Poughkeepsie and check your trunks from there. But perhaps that would be cutting out your own father ?" (Nanny could not know how she hurt me there.) "Anyhow, if you do start from Lime Point, don't let my dear mother force too big a lunch-basket on you. The best of basket-meals pall when you eat them in the same seat in the same car day after day. Meal-stations are a rest, and they do give you hot things."

These commonplaces were fascinating to me. I had taken many journeys, but never one like this. This was my start in life — at twenty-seven ! I had never made for myself and carried out a decision like this before.

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That night I went to bed early, as we all did by custom. My fire had been laid but not lighted. I thought I would e'en put a match to it and let the morning take care of itself. Then I remembered Mrs. Aylesford's early visits : I could see her seated on her little slipper-heels, — bless her ! — in front of my stove full of cold ashes, laying the kindlings and putting on the wood with her whole heart in the task. I could n't be sure of waking in time to get ahead of her, so there was nothing for it but to jump into bed and lie there thinking ; at home I never went to sleep before midnight.

So much has been said that no one pretends to believe about premonitions, — messages by the wireless of our semi-detached souls — and such cheap use is so often made of what we do believe, that some of us hesitate even to mention any little occult experiences of our own which have bordered on those questions we are satisfied to treat as mysteries belonging to the hereafter. On my side of the partition that separated my room from the one Mr. and Mrs. Aylesford occupied, I could hear that good man snore. From other suppressed little sounds through the night I knew that I was not the only watcher. Mrs. Aylesford was keeping me company, and I hoped her vigil might be happier than mine.

It may have been due to want of exercise, worry postponed and piled up about papa, excitement over the coming change in my own life, but, lying awake that night anxious, when I should have been thankful things were no worse, I had grisly thoughts for

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company. Nanny's check had been cashed and more than half spent for my tickets: that practically closed the contract between us. But if I could have drawn back, I believe I should have done so, — and gone home to Essie and the old mortifications in the morning.

I lay there (in a feather-bed the enveloping warmth of which I was n't used to) and went over minutely that first home-visit when Nanny and I had been fellow-guests in the house, both of us on our good behavior. I returned to her last letter; — even then she could not control her irrepressible worries. How would it be when she began to worry about me? Would I bear watching, as I had seen her watch the care-takers of her child? Could I be as patient as her own mother — who had not always been patient! It was not as if we were strangers: all the delicacy and poetry of our friendship without a flaw, was at stake. What had I to gain (except my support) by the experiment of joining myself to her for that intensive intimacy which I knew must be the result of our living together? Nobody had ever watched me in my life. I had had no domestic discipline, but I had been left alone. No; I should n't bear it well, and I should blame Nanny for not realizing the pressure of the maternal bond when its operation included an outsider. I had never been an outsider to Nanny, because the question as to out or in had never been forced. Now, indeed, it would be forced upon us both.

I was caught in a trap of my own making; and more or less of the time I should be watched by two.

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As far as that old introductory photograph was a likeness, I might say that I knew Nanny's husband by sight; his face came before me in the darkness, and with the dark side of my imagination I read its prophecies. He was a powerful person and a total stranger — and Nanny had said he did not talk. "Such men are dangerous." We might set up a fine mute antagonism for each other and crush Nanny's heart between us. That was nonsense of course; but something awkward would be sure to come of it. Tri-cornered arrangements were, my own father used to say, the very deuce! I could put aside the old vulgar plot of two men and a woman, or two women and a man, yet we three were an intricate combination. We might develop situations quite as painful if not so hackneyed.

Sleep came at last, some hours, very likely, before morning: going to bed so early had made the night seem endless. I feared, from my first look at Mrs. Aylesford, that she had watched the night through. I saw it in her ashen face when she slipped into my room and turned in silence towards the bed. Out of the window opposite, the cold, rosy east before sunrise confronted her. Her features showed a piteous pallor which the night arrangement of her thin gray hair made more haggard. How old she had grown!

I sat up in bed and smiled at her, and she smiled — it only made her look more wan.

"I thought I heard you up in the night?" she questioned me.

"Perhaps you did," I said. "I didn't sleep very

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well; excitement, I suppose. I am a perfect child about this journey! Did you sleep, dear Mrs. Aylesford?"

"Why, no," she said, "and it's queer I should n't. Father slept. I guess it's something in the change of wind. It's cleared off and there was a sort of stir round the house like rain, but it was n't rain." I saw her shiver. "Lie still if you have n't rested well. Let me send your breakfast up."

"No," I said. "I'm leaving you to-day and I don't intend to miss a single meal now I have so few left."

The look of apprehension back of her smile did not pass from my dear hostess's face. "I never thought I should be glad to see you go," she said. "But now I'm glad. You'll be with Nanny all the sooner. I shall be there too," she added with a little laugh it hurt to hear; it was so like a sob. "*I am* there—most of the time! I wish—" She did not finish. She came to the bed and kissed me, and her hands trembled as she touched my hair, looking in my eyes earnestly.

"You did n't hear anything last night, did you, dear?—that made you get up and listen?"

"I was up," I said, "but I was n't listening."

She did not believe me! "Then you did n't hear what I heard?" she whispered. "I can't speak of it to father. It was n't the wind. It was a sort of throbbing in the air—I can't think of anything but our swallows in the chimney beating their wings—in the hollow chimney. And it was n't like that either." She shook—her lips were white. Her eyes had a

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drear, strained expression, tearless with some incommunicable fear.

"Perhaps it was the wind in the chimney. It rose in the night, you said?"

"Oh, I know all the sounds of wind in this house," she answered. "Well; I'm nervous — I guess that's all. If there had been anything you'd have heard it too, if you were awake. Unless," she added softly as to herself, "it was only meant for me."

PART II

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VII

IN thinking over the mass of memories an average life supplies, almost without reference to comparative values, one is at a loss, in telling a story which hinges on one event, to choose only details that bear directly or constructively upon that event. Such a choice would leave out my continental journey which had no significance beyond the impressions of a few days ; impressions new to me because I had never seen my own country in its longitude before. The life and habits of a Pullman sleeper were new to me also.

We changed at Ogden then, where I telegraphed my friends in Idaho that I was on the way. This was before the Union Pacific lines took you through from Chicago in the same car. Also it was before railroad officials had learned that woman in the aggregate cannot be trusted with power to lock the door of the common dressing-room upon her fellow-traveling woman with rights equal to her own. I could not have believed the total want of imagination as to another's necessity, to say nothing of convenience, displayed by one or two of the women aboard that Pullman "sleeper." You waited in the narrow aisle outside that locked door, in your wrapper with most of your clothes and a bag of dressing-things on your arm, or you returned to your berth to hear, "Next station,

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twenty minutes for breakfast," cried outside your curtains. If you took the liberty of knocking persistently or with expressive emphasis, the fair one crimping her hair or manicuring her finger-nails within, opened at last with looks more outraged than your own.

All this, with other luxuries of home travel, I left behind me when the porter led me across the tracks at Granger and hoisted me and my bags up the platform-steps of the day-car I was to spend the night in on the Oregon Short Line. I thought I should miss my porter very much. Friends, when I left New York (for of course I did not start from Lime Point; that would have hurt Essie too much!), had brought me books and keepsakes at the last moment to swell my hand-luggage, and I had provided myself with all sorts of things suited to steamer- but not to train-travel, if you are to leave the main lines. But before I could cope with my own possessions they were all gathered up by the large sun-burned hand of a stranger who showed me to a seat and reversed the back of the next one, and advised me to "hold onto" them both, as I should need them that night. I was now spread over twice the space I had paid for. My friend raised his hat and went to his own seat farther down the aisle. The man beside him turned and took a long, deliberate, but respectful look at me over the chair-back. It was the nearest approach to a stare I encountered, though I was the only woman on the train.

^ The Oregon Short Line was built then only as

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far as Kuna, my station. Our train carried a caboose and a string of flat-cars loaded with material for the road. The men aboard were in working, not traveling, clothes. They looked like very free citizens of these United States, although they were not in one of them — merely in that future state of political existence, a Territory. I don't know why it pleased me so to think I was in a "Territory."

The country now was vast and broken, not by man with dynamite and steam-shovels, but by the agency of rivers and ancient glaciers and lava-flows. Through rents in the mountains that came down to the high plain we were crossing, you saw bluer mountains, snow-capped, flat against the sky. There seemed to be no roads, yet there must have been inlets and outlets of travel to all this region, old as the fur-hunters' and Indians' trails. They reached out now to the centers from which the white man's occupation had spread.

I began to feel such a castaway, so foreign to my kind about me, that merely to hear the sound of my own voice again I asked a question across the aisle, in the silence of one of our unexplained stops — When should we reach Kuna, and how far was Kuna from Boisé? I was careful to pronounce it as Nanny had, "Boy'-see." All seemed interested to learn I was going there. I felt like a traveler of importance in their eyes, with friends in the social centers and the marts of trade.

We ran slowly and stopped for no apparent reason, at places undistinguishable from nowhere. The heads

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of the near hills sank from sight like ships going out to sea. Others arose, a line of ethereal crests, the same that we had gazed at through gaps in the foothills, and these went with us, mile after mile. I asked and was told their names. One great peak was called "The War-Eagle" and the range it belonged to was the "Owyhees." Nanny's Owyhees! So now we were getting home.

Desert did not seem the word for this country, nor was it deserted—it was just coming into being after some long creative pause. Man as we know him had never been here. Yet he was coming; here and there he had come, and brought his wife and babies and dogs and chickens and with an appealing temerity had planted his hopes in shelters as wild and less habitable, they looked, than houses of prairie-dogs or a sage-hen's nest.

But the wind! You ceased to hear it while the train was in motion; when it stopped and you listened from your window or stood on the platform to look out, it was there—filling the silence with that breath of boundless atmosphere. It was this earth-stillness, manifest in subtle unfamiliar sounds, that gave me my first thrill—the "feeling" of the West. I have parted with it often for long periods and half forgotten it, but never lost it altogether. And the voice of it is that desert wind, soft, insistent, secret, that is known only in the heart of a great continent.

We were very near Kuna now. It seemed more and more improbable that any one could be waiting for me there. I may not have looked pale, but I felt

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pale—I felt like the last woman left on earth—when I rose to button my jacket as the brakes began to jar. My friend on the watch across the aisle rose, too, and smiling an “Excuse *me*,” gathered my luggage in his comprehensive grasp.

“Expecting any one over to meet you?” he asked. “Stage for Boisé don’t get in for an hour yet.”

I told him whom I expected. He looked at me quickly — “Did you say ‘Maclay’?— Oh, yes —” He hesitated. “They’ll send some one over. You’ve come quite a ways, have n’t you, lady? Maybe you did n’t hear—Maclay’s lost his wife, a few days ago? I just read it in the paper.”

. . . I still heard them talking around me, but I was obliged to sit down and close my eyes. “Is she sick?” some one asked. My friend’s voice drawled, “No; my fault! I told her Maclay’s wife is dead. *I* did n’t know she was a relation. Come like a surprise to her, I guess.”

Some one steered me out of the car—some one whom the others called “Dick.” He took me to an empty bench against the warm house-wall of the station. I leaned back in the darkness of intense sunlight and of another darkness of the senses and heard the clicking of telegraph-keys inside. Nanny’s mother was my first distinct thought. That dumb message in the night—it was articulate now! Those same keys had clicked out the news to her while I, unwitting, was on my way.

Two horses before a buggy were driven up. Various persons who had tried to be useful, but seemed

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to be there chiefly to look on, fell back as my escort joined me again and sat down. He asked me if I felt able to read a letter, and sat still and said not a word while I opened it, yet the effect of his silence was not cold but steadying. He was a young man, and I knew without distinctly thinking of it that he must be "Dick Grant."

The letter was from Douglas Maclay — hardly more than a page. I read it as one blow, but it took several more readings, shrinking from the words, to adjust my mind to their meaning. It was a very concentrated piece of writing. The blood went from my heart to my head in a sudden fury with the brute fact itself, with the way it was stated so tersely, with the writer himself. I was not accustomed to the language of men who as to their deepest feelings are dumb. What I would have had him say I don't know — to a stranger thrust into his life at this juncture. It was the day after Nanny's funeral! He had written on the evening of the day itself.

I got up on my feet and took "Dick's" arm and we walked to the edge of the platform and I sat down, and my feet rested on the soil of Idaho, my home. For this much had straightened itself in my mind. If there had ever been anything in our compact beyond self-interest on my side, my promise to Nanny could not be broken now. I shuddered to think: if I had completed my defection after that night of distrustful brooding — my telegram would have reached her just as she was parting from her babies, and dealt her the last blow — that I had failed her too.

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Mr. Grant (who said I must call him "Dick") asked for my checks and went to see the station-agent about sending my trunks by stage. All this I heard as if it were some one else going over to Boisé City. Back of the small noises of the station was another sound which I found myself listening for. It was in the air around one like the wind. It came again, but intermittent — not like the wind. The first meadow-lark of spring! Meadow-larks — of Idaho! The note was not quite the same, though nearly, as we used to hear it on the Hudson. Our meadow-larks nested in the long grass of the mill-pasture and we started them up — Nanny and I — when we went down there looking for dog-toothed violets that grew in the thick swales along the brook. And they would lure us on in short, uncertain flights, as if wounded, from their nestlings in the grass.

Under that great strange sky that seemed fairly dark with its depths of clearness, with the songs of the birds of home to welcome me, and Nanny not there! — it broke me down. I sat and cried to myself, not thinking of where I was or of what must come next, till my companion, who had seated himself beside me, said simply, —

"It does me good to see you cry. There has been nobody to cry like that! . . . When I first heard of it I wanted to get outside somewhere and howl like a dog."

Afterwards I knew what he meant, poor Dick, but then the words merely surprised me, coming from a stranger, and silenced my own outburst.

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We were trotting along the road through the sagebrush, the song of the meadow-larks rising all about us. I asked Dick to tell me about Phœbe. How was it with her, had he heard?

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "A neighbor took her in for the first awful days. There's been nobody but strangers! I suppose they will tell her something to satisfy her for the present."

"You mean she does n't know!"

"Not the truth," said Dick bluntly. "I'm sorry for you!"

"For me!" — I was thinking of the child's father. Had he left her, the day after the funeral! — left the "truth" to be handed to that child by a stranger? "This letter tells me I am to ask you anything I want to know. But I don't know what I do want to know!" I groaned aloud, to myself.

"Not yet, of course," said my companion. "Tomorrow I go back to the mines, but I'll be down again next week. Then you will want to know several things. Mr. Maclay might have stayed down to meet you, but he thought, I suppose, you would understand, and he very likely thought, too, that it would be easier for you to be left alone at first."

"He's a great person to leave you alone, is n't he?"

"Oh, he's a good boss," said my friend Dick. "He's on the job when he does n't show it. . . . He wished me to tell you that he thought you were still at her father's when he telegraphed — he supposed the news would reach you before you left there. It

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shocked him — on your account — when he got your wire from Ogden. But you will stay, now you've come? She counted on you so! And now you're needed more than ever."

I had answered that question to myself already; it was n't necessary to answer it to him. I asked about my dear Mrs. Aylesford — had anything been heard from them since the news reached her? It was as I feared. She was ill — prostrated: a word much over-used that now and then tells the truth exactly. As to the children's future, in this contingency — relatives on the father's side who could take them, he knew nothing. I had never heard Nanny speak of his parents as if they were living. Dick said my name was the only one he had heard connected with plans for the motherless children.

"When he found you were coming and it was too late to stop you, I could see he was immensely relieved; though he was anxious too about you. But there was no time to think! It was enough that you were coming. He hopes, I know, to leave the responsibility with you for the present. You'll do the thinking! His orders to me were: 'See what she wants and get it — if you can't get it, come to me.' There's help enough in the house, such as it is, and there is a good doctor at the Post — Boisé Barracks, close to town."

Here was a question I needed to ask — not this young man at my side. But perhaps if I knew the answer I should have to keep it from her parents. I should never know — for I could never ask Douglas

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Maclay! I could not think of him as anything but a tragic interloper in Nanny's fate. That he should hold authority to give or withhold facts, as between her parents and what had happened here, it was difficult to admit. There was nothing in my new attempt that I feared really except this man. I had always dreaded him, but Nanny would have been the key — and now the key was lost.

VIII

SPRING, in that great inter-mountain valley, was a setting fit for a lyric romance or a tale of daring and adventure. Instead, I must use it for a chapter which I can match with nothing in all my experience of grime except those passages, fresh in memory then, between me and poor old Captain Nashe. But through all my servant-wars and petty conflicts with crude circumstance ran one strain of exquisite compensation, sweet and haunting as the note of her own namesake bird, — “Phœbe, Phœbe!”

Noreen greeted me nicely. She had warm Irish manners, and hers was the kindly task to feed the stranger, suppressing curiosity as to how I might be taking the situation that confronted me. She even did that well. I sat still—at my first meal in the house—unable to eat, but glad of a moment to myself. It was not more than a moment. A door was pushed open, of a room adjoining the dining-room, and a large person stood there and stared. The eye that met mine suggested the mind of a fly behind it, a suspicious, cogitating, female fly of an exaggerated bodily distension, a blue-bottle fly persistent and possibly noxious. This I knew could be no other than the “monthly nurse,” and it needed only a glance to see that it would be well for her little charge when the month was over and equally for the rest of us.

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She was untidy, and being large there was a great deal of her untidiness. Over one shoulder she held a bundle of crumpled flannel containing Nanny's baby — Mrs. Aylesford's grandson, awaited across the continent with prayers and welcomed with tears of happiness. A foundling-hospital waif would have looked like a princeling for comfort and sweetness beside it.

"I expect you had quite a jar?" She fixed me with her dull, hard eye. "Pity they could n't 'a' let you know what's happened 'fore you come such a long ways for nothing. My name's Mrs. Lavinus. He's a fine little fellow, ain't he?" She pivoted her person that I might have a better look at a small puckered forehead the size of a kitten's, puffy eye-lids and cheeks awry lopping against her fat, unpleasant shoulder. "He's a ten-pounder. He won't miss his muzzer none, the duckums boy! his old Lavinus" — pronounced "vine" — "will take care of him."

There was no outside air in the room behind her. I glanced in: the simple, ladylike arrangements, the disorder, the — the stench! Nanny's room! I felt I should faint (though there was n't the least chance of it!) if she did not close that door.

On that memorable May visit at Lime Point, I had worn, as it were a sweater nowadays, a cloak called a "Killarney." It was one of the new spring fashions that year. I wore it walking in the woods; I sat wrapped in it evenings on the piazza-steps; it was always around me and often around us both, on gray chilly mornings when Nanny and I sat talking under

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the willows. This garment had been much admired by Mrs. Aylesford and expatiated on by myself, for it was one of my successful economies. It was copied from the imported ones at Arnold and Constable's at about a third of the price. Dear Mrs. Aylesford must have committed a mother's extravagance just as Nanny was going West, and sent for a duplicate of mine made to order: you could have them of any plaid you chose — mine was the Forty-second Highlanders, lined with scarlet. This, of course, I never positively knew. I only inferred it from a cruel little circumstance.

Noreen had gone across the yard to fetch Phœbe from the neighbor's house close by, — in the same lot only shut off by a slight fence. I had brought my own cloak on the train and threw it around me to go out and meet them. I found a little path (perhaps my Nanny's feet had often trod it in the days of her imprisoned waiting). The irrigating-ditch that watered the whole place ran alongside it; on the other side, the street-front, towered a wall of Lombardy poplars not yet in leaf, their tops shot through with gold of the spring sunset. Trust a Catholic priest for a sort of canonical good sense in laying out a garden!

I saw them coming towards me like a pair of happy friends, little Phœbe skipping along, her hand in Noreen's. A proud little face. The fair, straight hair, kinked by braiding and freshly brushed, stood out around the oval-round cheeks red with the breeze of running. She loosed Noreen on seeing me and flew to meet me. I had not dreamed of such a welcome! Her eyes — her

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whole, out-reaching, tense little body expressed one wild, passionate greeting. And then she stopped aghast—she turned with a cry I shall never forget and swerved from me straight to the house. I could not know that seeing me in that ghost-garment, walking where her mother had walked at this hour, she had taken me for her mother come back as mysteriously as she had gone. Her heart had leaped to my arms and then, seeing my face, she had flown like a wounded bird to escape capture. She had gone to the house for one more search—we could hear her as we followed, running from room to room, and her short step toiling up the stairs.

We did not exchange a word. At the top of the stairs she turned and saw me coming.

"Take it off! Take it off!" she screamed, and pointed at me.

"What does she mean?" I whispered.

Noreen looked me coldly in the eye. "You've got on her mother's cloak. I hid it in your closet on purpose so the master would n't be seeing it around."

My bedroom door stood open. I went to the closet: there hung Nanny's cloak, the mate to mine. Noreen saw me gasp—saw the two cloaks identically alike, and for that time she forgave me.

I could not bear the sound of Phœbe's hard crying in the hall; I shut my bedroom door and I did something else I had not done in years. I had not been a good girl who says her prayers every night. I did not say them even the night after papa went away. No, I could not have said a prayer for papa. Even

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while mamma lived, shy little churchwoman, she had not been able to keep up her own forms and household traditions, in the face of his indulgent levity. But I prayed then—if tears are prayer—and the thought of a face one has loved, as if it were there, looking at you and listening to the lonely sobbing of her own child beyond her reach.

And then I rose from my foolish knees and made my first effort with Phœbe. It was no more than an appeal as simple as a child's game, the game of all girl-children the world over ; the fun of feeding somebody.

I asked Noreen if, when Phœbe had her supper, she would give me a cup of tea at the same time, adding that Phœbe and I would be down directly, and that I was hungry !

Noreen looked at me in surprised attention till she caught the idea, when she responded heartily. Phœbe listened to the strange voice giving orders in the house, interested in the fact that she was to have a guest for supper. But she clung to Noreen till I said, "Put her down," and took her in my own arms struggling and bore her into my bedroom and shut the door. Most young children respect physical strength if it is not angry strength ; my back and arms are very strong, — result of posing, — and as I held Phœbe on my lap I told her this was "Aunt Edith's room" now, and we must get acquainted if we were going to have tea together. Nanny, in her letters, had already brevetted me as "Aunt" ; I hoped Phœbe might have heard of my coming by that name.

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She was at all events interested in my room which already looked different from my brief occupancy — strange bags and traveling-things, and garments new to her eyes and trifles such as girls consider necessary, lying around, on the bed and dressing-bureau.

I had brought with me, because I could n't help myself, one of those impulsive tokens friends are inspired to give one on the eve of a journey after your trunks are locked and gone. The excuse was, "I know you love it so!" Yes; I loved it, but hardly enough to have hand-carried it across the continent: — a little cast of the young Hermes, not the Praxiteles, but him with wings on his temples, the lovely, armless fragment now in the Boston Museum. I had taken it out and set it on my bureau, and seeing Phœbe's eyes fixed upon it, I put it into her hands. We looked at it together while the sobs subsided.

She studied the face in its cold serenity. "It looks like Dick," she said, and smoothed its bended neck with her beautiful little hand that she used so daintily. I had n't been fully aware of Mr. Grant outwardly, but I saw him now, the straight-featured, not very strong, profile I had sat beside on the drive from Kuna. It did look like Dick, in his modern-classic likeness to an imperishable ideal.

"It's broken," she sighed. "Where are Dick's arms?"

We talked a little while about the Hermes, and then we returned to the question of tea — was there a sugar-tongs and would Phœbe put sugar in Aunt

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Edith's tea? Phœbe would! — the sugar-tongs were stiff, but mamma allowed Phœbe to use her fingers if she touched only one lump — "Where's mamma!" — wildly. We smothered this outburst in more particulars about teas in general; how at grandmamma's, where Aunt Edith came from, we had tea in pink-and-white cups with gilt handles, in a room full of flowers. Did Phœbe know that she had once been at grandmamma's when she was a baby and Aunt Edith had seen her then, in her little carriage —? But this was dangerous ground.

"I'm going again some day, with mamma. Where's mamma *gone*!" I said tea must be ready, and we must take "Dick" with us, and Phœbe must feed him herself as he had no arms. This was a triumph, and we waited no longer lest we spoil it again. Dick had a clean pocket-handkerchief pinned around his shoulders to go down to table, and we appeared, all three, in the dining-room where Noreen was scarcely ready for us.

It was not best to pursue the victory. Noreen put Phœbe to bed, but I think she probably grew tired of "Dick" in the shape of Hermes; I noticed that with her Irish tact and ingenuity she had parted the little god from his worshiper and he was back on my bureau again when I went to my room to unpack.

The monthly nurse, Mrs. Lavinus, had found time from her duties to stroll heavily upstairs, and, my door standing ajar, she had entered uninvited and helped herself to the rocking-chair, drawing it forward conversationally. I had just planted a tray-full

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of summer things on the bed. She looked at these signs of a prolonged stay with a smile of irony.

"Be you unpackin'? I did n't know you was acquainted with any one out here except Mrs. Maclay? Who might you be goin' to visit with, if you don't mind me askin'?"

"I am not visiting," I replied. "I am Phœbe's governess, come to take charge of her and give her lessons. That was settled before I started: I stay to keep my promise to her mother." It seemed best to meet the issue squarely.

"Well, that's all news to me. I never heard a word of anything like that, nor no one else in the house, I guess. And I been here a week before the baby come. That's a funny thing!"

It did not surprise me that Nanny had not mentioned her plans to Mrs. Lavinus, but it would, indeed, make things difficult if Noreen, whom I was to supersede, and Hing, whose confidence I must gain, and this woman with the low greasy forehead and iron jaw, should all agree to look upon me as a guest cheated of her visit by a death in the house, who proposed to stay and assume command of the disorganized establishment. Whether this misunderstanding were real or pretended on Mrs. Lavinus's part, I saw she meant to work it to her own interest. She very likely thought it rather clever of me, taking advantage of the confusion to install myself in the new-made widower's house. I could see it in her amused, hard, speculating eye.

I had packed in the bottom of my trunk all my

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photographs from the Old Masters, papa's gifts, selected by him abroad. On top, as the trunk stood open, could be seen one of Michelangelo's Titans, from the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. Mrs. Lavinus caught a glimpse of it through its covering of tissue-paper. She hitched her chair closer and raised the paper. I heard an exclamation.

"Do you mean them things to be looked at! Excuse *me!*" She held up the large photograph to examine it, but worse lay underneath. The reclining figure of Adam receiving the divine spark from the finger of Jehovah, from the same series of the Creation.

"Well, I been in some funny places!" I heard her ejaculate, "but I never struck nothin' like this. You better leave them things right where they be! I would n't advise you to have 'em around in a house with men-folks and a little girl like Phœbe. 'Makes me most ashamed to look at 'em myself and I seen plenty of sick folks just as naked as the Lord made 'em."

She leaned back from my scandalous collection with a frown of actual bewilderment. "— And if there ain't another naked man!" she screamed, "if it *is* a man?" My poor Hermes stood on the bureau no longer clothed in even a pocket-handkerchief. I buried my face in throes of horrible untimely laughter that bordered on hysteria, and Mrs. Lavinus, regarding me with irony as well as suspicion, agreed it was enough to make a horse laugh! — such an exhibition in a young lady's bedroom.

"Say!" she relented, to give me one more chance,

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"I don't talk about what I see and hear in other people's houses, but what kind of a place is it you *do* come from? I know there's all kinds in New York same as everywhere, and I wouldn't say but what you seem like a lady all right. But what do you *want* of them things out here, would you just tell me — if it's true you come out to teach a little girl?"

Mrs. Lavinus, as I learned later, was a person whose presence had often been welcomed in that land of little help, with almost desperate relief. Dire necessity levels one's standards, and most of her patients had no standards higher than her own. She told me, in the course of incessant talking during meals which we shared, most of the adventures and hardships of her own life and all she had time to tell of the private affairs of her patients; she used the language of her profession and went into its details without mercy. Yet she was a woman of intrepid courage and wild experience, if her stories were true. She had borne children in extremity and lost them by the will of Heaven, she deemed, or the hand of fate. She could be a devoted nurse and work day and night doing wrong things with unshaken faith in everything except medical science and educated doctors. Of these she had her suspicions, and she explained that she was doing her best with her baby (Nanny's little son) in spite of "Doc Davenport, who thinks he knows it all!"

IX

DICK GRANT stayed over a day longer than he had said, and came early next evening on purpose to see Phœbe. We received him on the side-piazza steps, and Phœbe rejoiced greatly to be swung aloft in his grasp and let down gently, with a long, quiet look into her upraised face. "Again! more!" she begged.

"No more," said Dick. "Mustn't get too excited before bedtime."

As this seemed to be partly addressed to me, I smiled and asked how he knew all that.

"I've been around a good deal, in this family," he said simply.

He gently transferred the little maid from her seat between us on the steps to his lap, where she played with his braided-leather watch-chain attached to a cheap silver watch. With my sensational ideas brought from the East I asked if that meant "hold-ups" on the road to the mines? As I watched his smile, with head bent and eyes fixed on the child, I saw he was like the Young Hermes — in a blue serge suit and fair hair close-waved about the temples that were wingless.

We talked guardedly on account of little pitchers, but in any case I should have had many things to decide in my own mind before I began to bother Dick. And I could not talk about servants to him — at least

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I supposed I could not. I had not the full measure of his usefulness in "this family." One could see he was a dear, dependable boy. There would always be that delightful seriousness about him and modesty of a person gentle-bred who does one or two things very well. The things he did were different from the things they did — the geniusy youths whom I grew up among, hanging about the studio, sometimes in love with mamma (till she was past forty) or piling their love-torments in other directions upon her inexhaustible patience and pity, but I felt I had known Dick's kind all my life. He was a New York boy, too, and had gone to Charlier's, — the old Charlier School on Madison Square, — which also made us at home with each other.

It had not taken any time at all to recognize *his* trouble, as old as the hills. Perhaps Nanny never knew it. She was preoccupied, and Dick had fine qualities at his command. He might have been unselfish enough never to let her see it. It took me back to her tale of the mesa — lonely little châtelaine on her dry hill; "hands," men of all sorts, and four-footed beasts raising a dust around her and all the good money in the ground spent in vain. Dick must have been older than he looked, for he had been out there, part of and witness of all she endured. No wonder he had loved her. And, I added to myself, no wonder a reader of men, as a "good boss" must be, had trusted him. But she was the one who must have quite unconsciously decided the course of that perilous partnership.

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Dick could not talk of her himself, but he hungered to hear me talk, and I could n't—before Phœbe. A question or two that he could answer, I asked in French, and he replied as a Charlier boy should, though he said he was rusty. I saw how it had happened that not one person in the house knew what I had come for or why I stayed. Nanny's letter to me had been not only her last, but the closing-up of her affairs. Dick had posted it to catch the early stage and had returned to saddle his horse and ride to Silver City. There he had stayed till the news came of the end. He knew nothing of what had happened; but I was sure he felt that he, or indeed almost any one, could have done better than those who had had her life in charge, though all he said was: "She was just as well as you are—and then she was gone!"

Phœbe had fallen asleep as we sat murmuring of things she could not understand. Dick carried her upstairs when Noreen came for her (I was not intruding yet on the old routine). As he lifted her gently, one arm and limp little hand slid off his shoulder. I laid my cheek against it; it was warm like a soft little bird. It was easy to see how one might go distracted over anything like Phœbe if it were one's own, and lose all sense of proportion.

When Dick came back we talked business a few moments. He gave me a thin yellow book like a butcher's-book, but it was a bank-book. Mr. Maclay had deposited to my credit a month's salary ("if satisfactory"; the amount, I supposed he meant: it was too embarrassingly large to be satisfactory). I

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was very shy of the whole matter, and Dick felt a little awkward too.

"It's a great deal too much," I said. "I'm one of these wretched amateurs."

"We're all amateurs out here," he said gallantly. "I was to have gone to France to buy silks and laces: hence Charlier's. I came out here to try my 'prentice hand — on the dog, as you might say. I met Maclay and took the first job he had for me — anything so that I could stay. The country had got hold of me. But Maclay is n't an amateur. He knows responsibility does n't come cheap. He expects you to run everything and everybody in this house connected with his children, and of course he'll pay accordingly."

I glanced around. The door was open into the dining-room; Mrs. Lavinus's door also stood open. It was her way of airing a room, and she liked to hear what was going on — I think she heard Dick, I think she was very carefully trying to hear what we were saying, when we spoke in English. It was part of keeping an eye on a young person who had queer pictures in her trunk, and showed other signs of a very free-and-easy bringing up. I had heard her more or less of the time "patting" the baby a sound rather like a gardener spanking a piece of new-laid sod with the back of his spade, and this thumping had ceased. If she had heard, there was no help for it: the news that I was at liberty to discharge her would have to be broken to her some time. I imagined there would be no need now to break Noreen's share of it to her.

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I went down to the gate with my caller, and as it was early yet we walked up and down once or twice, and I remained still pacing the ditch-path after Dick was gone. There had been a long, entrancing twilight (we were pretty far north), and now the sallow afterglow took up the tale. There was not a shadow, merely a slow, soft lapse of light. By what was left, I saw crossing the grass towards me from the rear porch a woman, probably our neighbor in the little house. She was short and plump, dressed in a black skirt too long for wet grass, and bareheaded as befitted the place and hour. A light knitted shawl she wore crossed over her full bust was held tight against her waist by a pair of round brown arms. She let them fall as we met with an inclination which achieved grace, though she was not in person graceful.

"Is it Miss Bonham? I have heard that you came yesterday. I was just now in the house, but you had your company. If it is not too late I am coming to pay you a little visit?"

Without any defined accent she spoke in a cadence that was not English, but all the more charming for that. The management of the hands, the whole figure, showed other blood than ours. I welcomed it just then, after the pure Western-American type of Mrs. Lavinus (if that was her type), and my greeting probably showed it.

She did not presume; she walked beside me on the path, but when a bigger tree-hole intruded to narrow it she stepped back herself before I could, with the same grace in her inelegant proportions.

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Her voice was very soft and well managed ; the effect altogether on my nerves was that of beauty or music of a primitive kind that you do not compare or criticize, but just yield to for the time.

"If you are the neighbor who took in little Phœbe," I said, "her mother's friend owes you a great many thanks, Mrs. ——?"

"'Pettyjohn.' It is so they call it here. You owe me no thanks, *no* thanks, Miss, for that lovely lady ! My God, to go like that ! And she was my friend too. Every evening like this we walk together. She always say to me, 'Come over as often as you want — the place is yours ; make yourself at home' " — "ad'ome" ; she softened her consonants and slipped a vowel now and then. "It *was* my home, Miss ! I hear you have been in the Catholic countries. You know what is the place of a priest among his people ? *That* was my uncle, Father Lanfrey. He own all this." She looked around, and up at the trees ; she opened her arms wide and sighed. "It is a change — from that big house, the fine cool rooms, the ceiling so grand, the wall-paper — to my little, little cabin. One room, Miss, and a bed in that room, and a kitchen — for a doll ! A doll's house. But I am no doll, ha ! I work — I do not spare my hands. See !" She spread them both before me. "And while my uncle live not one thing, not one thing ! Noreen O'Shea, her mother, — she will tell you ! and she will say I was one big fool when I marry Petitjean. Ha, do I not know it ! It shows upon me plain as the day what a fool I was. Do me the pleasure, Miss, to come

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and visit me. You shall see my folly in the house I inhabit now that Petitjean has thrown away my fortune that I had from my poor uncle. He left me rich, *rich*, Miss! I was the mistress of that house, of all this place from that road to this, and the meadow and the stable on the other side. It was the choreman lived there who made the garden and took care of the horse, where I am living now. I—where he lived, my uncle's hired man! 'Poor Eugénie!' I can hear him speak to me in those leaves above my head of the trees he planted; 'Poor Eugénie!'" She laid one hand upon her breast. "That is how it is with 'poor Eugénie' these days!"

Here, I thought, might have been innocent amusement for lonely Nanny, now and then, but in the frequency of those evening walks, and the freedom of the place at all times, I did not put much faith. That was not much like an Aylesford. And I should probably have to moderate my own indulgence in the pleasing change from pure unadulterated Americanism embodied in Mrs. Lavinus, to this seductive little person of the shadows,—neither a lady nor a servant, but with that touch of temperamental insanity one so welcomes now and then after heavy doses of the literal-minded. I thought it would depend upon myself to choose how much we should see of each other; I was involved much deeper than I knew.

X

NEXT morning I took up my duties a little more definitely and things began to fall into shape, not without friction on Noreen's part: Mrs. Lavinus I did not meddle with as yet. There had been a hitch between the two as to which should wash the baby's little things by dozens that could not go to "the Chinaman" nor to the steam-laundry, with the family wash. Hing, I found, did the bed- and table-linen, but refused to include anything of Mrs. Lavinus's, for personal reasons which he made perfectly plain: I did not blame him.

"She wash *herself*—I wash her *sheet*. She no wash, *I* no wash!" This was an ultimatum.

Between Noreen and Mrs. Lavinus the question had been settled out of hand by the latter walking across the yard with the baby's wash and leaving it to Mrs. Pettyjohn's good-nature to help out a neighbor. I suggested to Noreen (never having heard of a professional nurse who would do washing) that, as I should now relieve her at certain hours with Phœbe, she might find time herself to do the baby-things. She agreed with me that enough of the work was being sent out. However, she carried the matter to her excellent mother and Mrs. O'Shea added her word to our counsels. I shall not tamper with her delicious brogue in any of my feeble imitations.

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She said, in one long, flowing sentence, that there was plenty of help in the house if every one did what they were paid for. That Mrs. Lavinus was used enough to wash for her patients, both mother and baby, and in many a place she would have the man to cook for and the children to mind, so she need n't be putting on any airs. She was having the time of her life and if we made it too easy for her the life would last a long time. Noreen was not one to count a few bits of washing here and there, but the nonsense of it, that woman claiming she had no more to do than sit under a baby from morning to night! But, not to make trouble in the house, Mrs. O'Shea for the present would do up the baby-things herself: thus the principle was maintained and the bills not increased through Noreen being afraid of any little thing she'd lay a hand to. Mr. Maclay, poor man, was paying out enough, with three women and a Chinaman in it and naught but two children to do for. To drag in more help was a scandal. Thus Mrs. O'Shea:—"And not a cent will it cost him whatever I'll do. A grand man!—grand folks they were and a pity there was n't more like them."

It was a defeat worth many a victory. Mrs. Lavinus was supposed to feel keenly the reproach of those baby-clothes sent in in speckless piles, but it is doubtful if she did. She eyed Mrs. O'Shea's ironing with a critical smile and remarked the woman had better buy herself a pair of spectacles: her work looked as if she had done it in the dark.

That evening I walked again under the poplars

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and again was joined by my short and shadowy companion from across the yard. I asked her without any sentiment to give me the amount of her bill, her wash-bill—and thanked her for helping us out in an emergency.

“Nothing, nothing, Miss! No; I do what I can when such trouble comes, but I do not take in washing. You have misunderstood. I do what I can—anything, for the sake of such a friend as the lady we lost. I never can forget her—no, never!”

It was a case for a little more tact than I had shown, but my mistake was forgiven. Very soon the stream of soft, measured syllables began to pour forth; our steps agreed, we turned at each end of the path in perfect time. I saw how the little woman could have danced.

“Ah, Miss! What an hour for those confidences between friends! I never see the stranger I could feel so near to from the first hour we met! Here, where I come to rest my eyes from the bare ground in my back yard, looking, looking at the trees and the grass—like I was a prisoner with one little hour to breathe the fresh air. It comes so easy, Miss, to tell you the secret of my heart,” she murmured, “and how it is I can bear what I bear now. I wait! In less than two months my happiness will come. May is my month—he comes, my sailor-gentleman, my lover! We are to be married.—A medical officer, on board the ship I made my first voyage on to France. It is not much, the salary—it is very little. But my father’s aunt in Normandy has left me her

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small savings. I make the trip to see about that money, and so I meet my fate! A man any woman — yourself, Miss — would be proud to love. Ah, Petitjean! Him?" — I had not questioned her — "I give you my word I have not seen that man in two years! If he is dead I do not know; I am rid of him! But, Miss," — her voice fell, — "in our Church they are very hard upon those who have the unhappiness in marriage. Because I make this one big mistake I must be yoked with it now for the rest of my life. I cannot be happy, I shall not make my good lover happy — not though I never see that man Petitjean again. No priest can marry us. No church will have us at the altar. Very good! We go before the magistrate. But where, I ask you? Will you step into my little cabin, Miss, — my chicken-coop! Not that you will find the chicken, ha, ha! But small — one room and a bed in that room. Hardly three person can stand on the floor. — Ah, Miss; I might have stood up with my brave doctor in that beautiful bay-window of the house that was my home. I do not ask that — my God, no! Do I not see as I speak to you what lay there so white! I would not *dream* of asking that of the poor husband so soon — not in one month, or two! But the dining-room, Miss: what is that? What *deef*erence could it make to Mr. Maclay up in Silver City if we make our little procession across the green grass and be married in that room what nobody use but to eat! It is not even the house — it is the wing!"

When there seems nothing left in the world to laugh

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at, and we feel as if we should never want to laugh again, remains always the maniacal seriousness of us poor humans, each involved in his own craze. My aging boy of a father, his hand in his brother-maniac's, chasing down the world to find the end of a rainbow he beheld once when he was twenty-three. And my Nanny — at the end of her rainbow — in the priest's bay-window; and Mrs. Pettyjohn coveting the place for her second nuptials; and I alone, after all the dreams, taking in my fearful hands the task we had promised each other to share — I whom Essie would not have trusted overnight alone with one of her own brood (though she trusted almost any nursemaid she could hire for seven dollars a week). Surely it was enough to make one sob with laughter. But I am not often overtaken as when Mrs. Lavinus first became acquainted with the art of Michelangelo.

Well; at least we — that is Mr. Maclay — could give Mrs. Pettyjohn a piece of wedding silver and square the washing-account. In my experience as a woman and sometime housekeeper, the family wash is one of the points on which the family existence seems to pivot. No wonder it passes for one definition of a home.

The business part of Dick's call had included a request from his chief that I should send him weekly reports on the children's health and domestic matters generally, to keep up the circulation, as it were, between the two halves of his being. It seemed little enough to ask, but herein I saw I should have a

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chance to earn a portion of my preposterous salary. I am not practiced in writing reports, and I was on frightfully delicate ground with this reticent, wounded man. Moreover, I had some pride on my own account. In his business he must have had to be always pushing aside importunate but not important little matters—and now to get it weekly from what was left of his home—my threadbare reports after Nanny's letters! I should have nothing to write of but fusses between the servants and the personal habits of Mrs. Lavinus. I might go off in raptures over Phœbe, but there was not much danger there for either of us.

I labored hard over those letters: I re-wrote, I excised, and put back, and transposed sentences,—I even copied, humbly as a school-child thanking elderly relatives for exactly the wrong gift at Christmas,—and expected to hide the fact. I hid everything I could connected with my private frame of mind. And I hesitated to present Mrs. Pettyjohn's appeal. She sighed over the delay which I did not explain—she said it was very inconvenient not to know; she was lying awake every night with the horror of it—seeing herself reduced to the chicken-coop at last. Would I please speak soon? I yielded and wrote, though I should have much preferred to leave the matter for her to settle with Mr. Maclay personally when he came down. The answer was one sentence, a curt negative; at least it seemed curt to me who had it to deliver,—and a check to “make it right” with Mrs. Pettyjohn, either in that form or any form

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I thought best : I was to choose the form. There was no recognition of her claim to be considered a friend or an equal or even a neighbor in affliction. It was "right" enough if he felt that way, but it left me with a very unpleasant errand. I resolved to wait and try once more in words when — if ever — he came down to see his child.

XI

DICK had arrived a third time; he was becoming apologetic. This time his chief, he said, had positively intended to come himself, but was prevented at the last moment. When a certain business telegram had been received, if it did not send him off somewhere else, as it might, he would surely come—if only for a day. Dick fumbled his wording of these second-hand excuses which it struck me were probably his own; I was frankly irritated.

I said outright: "There is no necessity of his apologizing to me, or your apologizing for him. If he dreads me half as much as I dread him, I wonder he comes at all. That is, if he can stand it not to see Phœbe."

By this time Dick and I were saying pretty much what we felt to each other. He was my only safety-valve. But there was another side to our fast-growing intimacy that bored and annoyed me. I too loved Ophelia, but I did n't sit and brood over it in stern silence and look at the stars as if I saw her there. It was indecent for him to set up a lovesick bereavement of his own in the face of our common sacred sorrow. I thought he had better be shaken out of his obsession that fate should have reserved Nanny for a different and younger man; that he should probably die unwedded since he would never see another

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like her. I did not dispute that, but I would have predicted without a blush that in one or two more of these visits he would be in love with me if the thing had not already occurred. He was exactly like a sentimental widower in the first stage of offering himself to number two. Therefore in my heart I derided him, yet forgave him, for I knew so well his kind. He was a "queener," but his queening would always be chivalrous and never common. I saw I was destined to my late Nanny's throne, and mocked myself of the fate before me. Yet in bare self-defense and to shield her memory, I prepared to do my duty in the case. He would get little joy of me, but he might get a few counter-pangs to medicine his woe. A good deal of the time I wanted to shake him; and he was bringing me round to the side of the Black Douglas as chapters of laudation could not have done.

I had just come down from putting Phœbe to bed. That was the day's crowning duty now, and I did not forget the bedtime prayer. I thought even more of it, perhaps, because my own prayers had ended at my tired little mother's knees. Dick had carried her up and she had given him his usual payment.

"Phœbe sends you another 'good-night,'" I said, as we began our usual walk on the ditch-path.

"Good-night what?"

"Good-night kiss," I answered, careless of consequences.

"Where is it?" Dick came back correctly.

One does n't stoop to folly with a child like Dick without reason; I have stated mine — perhaps need-

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lessly : twenty-seven is not so very old, and playing with pretty boys had been one of my accomplishments formerly. I could spare it, but one likes to take a hand in an old game just to convince one's self that the art is not one of the things "that never come again." I gave Dick my hand and conventionally but very nicely he bent his Hermes head and kissed it, flushing in the evening light.

The next moment was a trifle awkward for us both. I fell back on my usual matter-of-factness. "You've been a great help to me, Dick, but there's more to come! Before we go back to the servant-question," — we had come to it finally; there was no help for it, — "I want to ask you to accept a little keepsake from me. I happen to know it is your birthday. Phœbe told me."

"Phœbe should n't tell secrets."

"You should n't have secrets with Phœbe. I shall get them all if you do. Wait here while I get *it*."

"It" was my cigarette-case for which I had no use now. It was one of Jack's finds, which he swore he had got for a song, but nobody believed him. He was afraid to give it to Essie, he said, but he got his wiggling from us both, and I kept the case: there was no sentiment between Jack and me. It was of dark, dull silver, Russian workmanship, bearing a crest of who knows who? And under it a scroll set with tiny turquoises and edged with tinier brilliants like a blue ribbon with a sparkling border.

"But this is too splendid," said Dick. "I'm embarrassed."

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"Not at all: it's only a second-hand thing my brother-in-law picked up and chucked at me, so to speak. Not but what I think it is good."

"Good! I'm afraid I don't even know how good it is. Looks as if it might have had a history."

"I dare say it's had rather a checkered career. Some grand duchess was robbed by her maid, perhaps. . . . Neither of them any better than they should be."

Dick had opened the case and found it filled. He looked at me curiously.

"These your brother-in-law's too?"

I said they were mine, and that he would find them "good" if they had not deteriorated.

"You smoke!" said he.

"Not now, of course." I had in fact given up cigarettes early in the winter. Smoking one now and then with papa in our cozy way was a quite different thing to making a three-some with Captain Nashe. I had never permitted him to see me smoke; another of those little definitions papa must have felt and passed over.

"Well, frankly, I like your giving it up 'now,'" said Dick.

"Well, frankly," I retorted, "I should think that goes without saying. It seems to be one of the most obvious comments on women's smoking anyhow — though I don't mean to be narrow. Do your women at home smoke?" (I knew they did n't: the practice was in its infancy in American society then.)

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"No," said Dick decidedly, "and I don't think they ever will."

"But you'll take my box and help a friend to save herself from temptation?"

"And, not to be 'narrow,' will you smoke a last one with me — as a sacrifice to duty?"

"But don't let's be too oppressively virtuous. Call it 'cakes and ale' for the new owner — the uncriticized masculine who can do as he pleases." I took a sacrificial cigarette — "I burn my ships," said I. Dick gave me a light and lighted up himself. He was getting interested, poor little brother Dick! I could have convinced him in two shakes that smoking was all right in spite of my "duties." . . . And so we walked and smoked together without narrowness.

"To return to the servants," said I, "do you mind their gossiping about us? I see Mrs. Lavinus strolling apart — not so very far apart. I think she can see us — me."

"Why, I don't worry much about the servants — have n't seen many since I came out here."

"You'd worry more, perhaps, if you happened to be one of them yourself. I think I shall desist, as the saying is. It's a form of amusement too worldly for this place."

"Are you serious?"

"I can't even give you my reasons for being serious: I'm not proud of them. So, here's for cowardice!" I had not courage to complete the ceremony and finish my cigarette in public — not with Mrs. Lavinus for the public. Remembering also that she

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might have seen Dick kissing my hand — he had no idea, indeed ! Nor had I begun as yet to think of the world outside our fences that now was my world ; I had seen so little of it. But I was uncomfortable about Noreen being buzzed at by Mrs. Lavinus, perhaps buzzing back to have her own impressions of the new mistress checked off according to the weird distortions of the Lavinus mind.

I knew that in coming to a place like that I should need much poetry. Where there are no musicians, it is music ; where there is no painting nor sculpture, it is art ; where life is limited and centers on material things, it gives wings to the mind ; where there is no inspiring talk, it is “ashes and sparks, my words among mankind.” It is the concentrated essence and impact of a human soul. And so I had brought every poet I possessed except those I knew I should find on Nanny’s shelves. In my Swinburnes, in each volume, there was much that I should never read again and in each there were one or two poems that none of us can spare. I went into my room one day and went too quickly and surprised Noreen poring over one of my Swinnys. She raised a heated face and closed the book, confused and rather breathless. It was not because I had found her reading when she might have been mending — she had been encouraged to read books of my selection. It was what we know is wrong with some of our biggest of the great ones, and since they cannot die, *it* cannot die, but remains to mar their work, — to provoke curiosity as to the author’s age and the period it marks, and what stuff of

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humanity went to feed the immortal flame. The psychology of it did not concern either Noreen or me, but I should have protected the immaturity of her mind. Employers are sometimes blamed for leaving money and jewels around to tempt character in the making. This was a subtler but not less irresponsible form of carelessness. My fault! And I saw how I should be punished.

Nor should I have wished to assault even Mrs. Lavinus's virgin mind with the sophistications of Old World art, but that was an accident. In a measure I had lived down Michelangelo with Mrs. Lavinus, who was shrewder than Noreen, and more calculating, and more hardened in looking out for herself. She was not deceived as to the fact that I was a person who wielded a certain sort of power; that she did not know what sort rather helped me than otherwise: I had not given her much satisfaction as to my past. She had ceased to regard me as "gay" in her sense of the word. If she defamed me to Noreen, she would do it deliberately now—to get me, or Noreen, out of the way. Between us, then, there was no misunderstanding to speak of; it was simple war.

And yet I could not measure its importance. I was taken up with other things. The baby was horribly on my mind, remembering Nanny's rules, and I could do nothing there as yet. Phœbe watched me and took in every word and never forgot one that I let slip, with the mental helplessness and amazing perceptiveness of a highly intelligent, sensitive child

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of her age. I had never listened to my own words, and I was astonished to find how very much I needed editing from this new point of view. I must abandon hyperbole and bethink me of every possible misconception that a child's imagination can put upon unfamiliar words and expressions of her elders. I no longer rose from the ground of literalness in my speech unless we were telling stories. Between the child's funny little ears and the servants' minds I cultivated a habit of not talking, but listening.

Essie, who was so satisfactory herself when you were with her, did not shine as a correspondent. Her sisterly conscience did not remind her that letters would be the chief food of my existence now. Meager fare she gave me, yet I never knew before how I loved her and depended on her light, cool touch upon my congested frames of mind. And she loved me the same, but was too busy to say so. Jack, when he happened to feel like it, would chaff me now and then in a perfectly unrealizing way which amused and hurt a little too. It made New York seem very far away. Subconsciously, I must have worried always about papa. Essie had nothing to tell me of him beyond his cables — of course *he* would not write, in the throes of creation.

As for the West — I had left it behind on the road from Kuna, with the meadow-larks and the hot sun on the sagebrush and the soaring sky between the far-off blue ranges with their snow-capped peaks. I remembered the wind and the simple great chord of color and the sting of the air and its odors, but that

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was as far away too as New York or Tahiti. The pioneer families of Boisé, and perhaps of all other little fortuitous towns, seemed to have shrunk into their little yards thick with trees as fast as they could grow trees, away from Nature as they found her. They must have found her too much for them, or it was pure homesickness as genuine but different from mine. Lovely tall poplars or box-elders or cut-leaf maples lined the streets; they were out in full leaf now. With so many leaves about the little house you could not see the mountains or the sky. Behind our fences in the priest's garden I felt stifled with all this green, and I was restless for a long, fast walk once more. Whoever has idled along with a child's uneven step beside her, though she may fully accept the bonds, will remember that they are felt all the same. Everything about one is in bonds to the child of one's care. This was what had tired Nanny! I was treading in her footsteps—a few weeks, to her six years. I stood in such awe of my servant household that I should n't have dreamed of going out at night after Phœbe was in bed—following the street we were on out to the plain between us and Boisé Barracks, crossed by trails the soldiers made. I should have adored to meet the soldiers themselves, gallant chaps with white stripes, or yellow stripes on their trousers, — for the troopers sometimes walked. They also rode: squads of them two and two went clattering past our road-gate; we never got there in time to see more than their flat, square backs. How they sat those big bay horses! I

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had never known a rider's thrills — and well I had n't! I could not have borne any more.

As to the town ladies calling — I never thought of them; I did n't know who they were. In my thoughts, practically day and night, were three women: Nanny, Essie, and Nanny's mother. Nanny for pure yearning dumb and lasting; Essie for mundane pangs of disappointment day by day, and often unjust reproaches repented of with more love; Mrs. Aylesford for a quiet, reverential sort of pity, knowing that with her things could not last — her rest would come one way or another before many years; that was not an urgent pain. Callers! I was so thankful that no one came to perplex my life any further — and all of it so little! I hope I have not exaggerated my blind wretchedness at this time, nor overdone my impressions of the smallness of the town. I know it was considered a little heaven below by the old stage-drivers and their passengers, when they saw it across the river after two hundred and fifty miles, I think I was told the journey used to be, from the main roads of travel.

. . . And so to return to our walk under the poplars: Dick still smoking his share of our sacrifice, I inhaling its perfume with less envy of his act than with one of those subtle stabs connected with the ordinary sense of smell. Why should our noses open, as it were, into our very souls! Of course a dog's nose does — I have watched my bull-terrier on a summer night, the air full of odors near and far, planted on the parapet of the terrace like a statue

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but for the quivering of his nose and the slight shudders that pass over his tense, tough body. We must get it from them by the dark backways of being. I was sick with old memories of things forgotten and inexpressible, only because it was a night of spring and I was still young and I breathed the odor of a young man's cigarette of a brand I had smoked with papa in the dear old studio days past recall, never to return — such was my foreboding. Do we love those who belong to us less because they have hurt us? We know that we do not. There seems to be no appreciable end to love any more than to memory, if we make an imaginative use of it. As to partings — there are worse things (and I hope Mrs. Aylesford knew it) than the clean pang of death. I could have wished my father — Of course I did not wish anything like that!

“Dick,” I said “there is something I dread to ask you, but it's time I did. I've never seen — where they have — laid her. Is it a place it would kill one to see? Say so if it is. I'd rather never go.”

“Oh, you must go! — some one ought to go. I've been waiting for you to say this.”

“Well, where is it?”

“I'd rather you did not see it first by day; that's the truth. When I go, I go evenings — after I've been here and seen Phœbe.”

(Oh, Dick, you dear boy) — “And you take her flowers? That's what you wanted the white narcissus for and the violets!”

“Yes,” he said. “She planted the white narcis-

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sus where it would show against the blue flag. She said it grew like that at her old home."

"Oh, Dick! And I suppose they are the only flowers she has had! I have been so selfish!"

"Oh, not you!" said Dick with savage emphasis. "But there are flowers sometimes—I met the one who brings them, one evening. She was coming in as I came out. I watched and saw what she did; they were hothouse flowers. She must have bought them or begged them. It was little Mrs. Pettyjohn. She sort of adored Mrs. Maclay."

"Well, when can we go? If not by day you must come early some evening—come to tea. We have dinner in the middle of the day on Phœbe's account."

"I wish you could see it by moonlight. This is the last night we could—the moon rises a little after eight. Will you go to-night? I'm going back to-morrow. I don't know when I may be down again. Would you rather go with him?"

"I will never go with him!" I cried. For slowly I had been getting "mad" all through at what seemed the man's unparalleled selfishness, up at the mines, shifting everything on Dick, leaving it to the poor neighbor he scorned to take a few flowers to his wife's grave, and never coming, not once, to lift his little motherless Phœbe in his arms. I scorned him!

I went to see if Noreen was in the house. She was. I told her I was going for a walk and changed my slippers to shoes. It was less than two miles there

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and back Dick had said. I had no wish to stay — merely to take one look and learn the way. After, I should go when I felt like it—and take Phœbe's flowers, the wild-flowers we were finding now on our rambles.

But we did stay. Dick was beginning to feel that he knew me very well. He could speak of his trouble, now that it was softened a little by what to youth is "time." And he too was alone in his life of suppressed emotion. Things were said in that moonlit place — in the presence of that little mound so bare, with its few withered flowers and Mrs. Pettyjohn's offering in a tin tomato-can filled with water she had fetched herself, planted in the dry soil. It all came out, Dick's confession, which was the last irony! His youthful resentment against one who had found the road to Paradise and gone in, and, as Dick thought, trampled the young flowers within the gate. I clothe his half-uttered meaning in the words of an old fable that had haunted me in the same connection. But when Dick took up my case and made it his own, I did not feel proud of it. Dick, I was sure, could be even less just than I to Nanny's husband. It was Mrs. Aylesford who knew. And one must allow something for a girl like Nanny knowing her own mind. . . . But I listened to him and saw the time was not ripe for wisdom.

What struck me was that he, the despoiler, must have chosen this spot. He had seen it was the only place — in that horrible garden of monuments and

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cheap symbols and private fencing and planting—; here in this virgin plot where some one had left a few exotic cypresses, preparing for the tomb which was never built, he had brought his own ill-guarded treasure, withdrawn from the common grief. It was very suited to an Aylesford. The very trees were like the cedars of her old home. I could have told her mother about this spot. Curiously it drew me towards the man who had seen it too. . . . Dick could not know all the while I listened what a sad young fool I was thinking him. But it behooved me to be patient. Had n't mamma been so! I could not remember, but I knew of her patience, her tired, bored despair with some of the highly charged temperaments that cried for the moon in her image. Papa in his inimitable way had set this off—seeing it and enjoying it with his literary mind. He was not actually flippant—it came from his appreciation of the humors of life, even married life. I don't suppose my mother was a beautiful woman, but she wore the imperishable rose of beauty in her breast. And no fairy had bestowed it on her for the subjugation of mankind. It was the flower of her own heart.

XII

IT was late — very late — past ten, when we opened the little road-gate and stepped inside to meet the same odor of good tobacco that had raked me all up before. A man came towards us slowly down the walk, tossed his cigar into the thick of the poplars and returned the hand to his pocket. He took it out again, however, when he greeted me. It was Mr. Maclay, arrived somehow at last and expecting to go off by the early stage. So I had lost my only chance for the talk I needed to have with him, and lost it in a way that must seem unnecessary, to say the least. I thoroughly disliked Dick at that moment. And he looked infuriatingly handsome as he returned his chief's casual recognition, and bowed over my hand with a lingering good-night pressure I did not thank him for. Bother Dick ! Things were serious with me.

I said to my visitor in his own house that I should like to tell Noreen that I was back ; as he had been kept waiting already, so long, a few minutes more perhaps would not matter. He smiled without looking at me and said nothing. No one, not my own father, could have passed the matter off more calmly, and there was not a trace of my father's latent irony. It was more the philosophy of the business man who does n't expect people as a rule to keep their engagements or to spare his time. I did not care to be taken

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on that basis. I loved my trust ; and I seemed to have been playing with it and showing an amazing insensibility besides. Dick and I were associates in the same delicate service, and I apparently was corrupting him, a boy, and I an old girl of twenty-seven. It need n't and should n't have been — the hour we sat there talking unwholesome nonsense by Nanny's grave. And I could n't have even the common satisfaction of saying, "Out upon him !" for Dick too was under the pressure of loneliness and the subtle anguish of the spring.

I ran upstairs to dismiss Noreen. I was ashamed before the very servants. Noreen had been washing that day and was a tired, sleepy girl ; and then I went back to face my employer. I could see that this first extraneous awkwardness had relieved him of something deeper which he must have dreaded in meeting me with my heart packed full of memories — his own memories. Did he suppose I should chatter to him about Nanny ? We began upon business at once hurriedly. I suggested we return to the ditch-walk. He may have thought it was coming now — the things women say, the platitudes of sympathy.

He looked at me keenly : "You have had a long walk, have n't you ?" (He would naturally think so ! We had kept him two hours waiting.) "Are n't you tired ?"

"We were sitting under the trees part of the time," I answered, gritting my teeth.

"You are very much confined — Do you know how to drive ?"

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I said I knew nothing at all about horses. "But this place does not seem small, after a city yard."

"But after a city!"

"I think we must talk outside," I persisted. "I want to speak of the 'domestics.'"

He seemed relieved; he rose at once.

We began with Mrs. Lavinus: that lady's month was up and I proposed we should get rid of her, or if she could not be replaced, to put her strictly under the doctor's orders, the doctor at the Post, and be empowered myself to see that she carried them out. "If she is doing as well as she knows how, then she does n't know how!" He did not ask for specific charges, but I volunteered a few. I had seen her test the warmth of the baby's food by putting its bottle to her lips. I knew the bottles were not sterilized — I had been studying up myself a little, I told him, and was no rude infidel — and I had the evidence of more than one of my senses that the room she kept the baby in — far too much of the time — was not properly cleaned. I "let him have it," as the saying is, for I thought he had shirked long enough. He took a deep breath suddenly when I spoke of the room. (I might have spared him that: it was almost coarse to speak of Nanny's room.)

He said he did not suppose that Mrs. Lavinus was very professional, but there were none who were — she was as good as any of "them." I said I wished to make Noreen the baby's nurse. She was clean, to begin with. I could get my instructions from the doctor and translate them to her much better than I

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could stand guard over Mrs. Lavinus, even if she would submit to it. The issue must come soon, and I asked for authority to meet it. I saw him smiling to himself, and saw no occasion for the smile. I added that I wanted to make the baby's food-formula myself and take care of him at night. Hard-working servants were too sleepy. And now he did not smile.

He said, "If you have Phœbe on your mind all day, you must not be disturbed at night. You need the mental rest." (We both must have thought at the same moment, how much rest would the children's mother have had?)

"You may trust me not to injure my own health, and with the doctor's advice I think I shall not injure the baby. I hear him every night—it would be easier to be there and see what he cries about. He is a very strong little baby, or—" He gave another quick gasp. I was an infidel! I was torturing him quietly in every word.

He did not shirk now nor leave things at loose ends. He gave me a free hand, as he had meant to, he said, from the first. "If I had n't, your letters would have shown me that I could. I want to thank you for them. . . . And now, about yourself? Am I forcing all this on you? Do you want to go anywhere else from here?"

"Not at present," I said. Pledges between us were not required, nor that I should confess that I had not anywhere else to go if I would escape dependence.

"I'm afraid I can't promise you any prospect of

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relief, for some time at least. Mrs. Aylesford's house would be the natural place for the children, but she is—did Grant tell you?—in a very critical condition, mentally, it is feared.”

Mr. Maclay looked at you briefly but penetratingly when he talked, and then off as if considering things in general. I have noticed this in men who give orders;—but those short glances may go deep. I had one more request, which was n't mine, but Mrs. Pettyjohn's. When I brought it up again he looked at me in that cool, sudden way. I guessed he was surprised that I should return to a matter he had once decided, and wondered at my reason. I scarcely cared to have him think it a personal espousal of Mrs. Pettyjohn's affairs, but I was willing to bear the odium for the sake of those flowers. One might smile at the unassuming tomato-can, poor soul! But the long walks in the heat she had not advertised, with all her love of effect. *He* would never know of them! I took it as my own debt, and I determined it should be paid.

I spoke once more of the loan of the dining-room, intimating that it seemed a little thing for one that meant so much to her.

“It is not a little thing,” he answered. “She should n't have asked it. She knows if her uncle were living he would not marry them nor permit them to be married on this ground. You know what the Catholics think of divorce! It's not certain she can be married, legally,—I should doubt if she has her papers all straight. That would be no business of ours if we

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did not hold a candle to it — put a roof over its head. . . . I see you have some scruple in this? Is it anything more than kindness?"

I said that *she* had been very kind — to little Phœbe. He knew of that, and was "very sorry." It should n't have been! He was thankful I was there and such a thing could not happen again.

But it had happened, I persisted. "She did her best — are we to do nothing in kind?"

And then we both paused and he seemed to gather breath in that racking way whenever he approached the name he had not spoken once in my hearing.

"Phœbe's mother felt as you do — about our neighbor. She sent her fruit and vegetables — as you will, when we can spare them from the garden. But she found it best to have no running back and forth. It was n't easy — but it was necessary. As I came up the street I saw some little girls poking and slapping something that lay out next the sidewalk, fanning it with their skirts and breathing the dust. It was a mattress that some doctor must have ordered destroyed. They don't burn old mattresses here without special orders. We may expect a crop of scarlet fever or small-pox in the neighborhood soon. Sporting chances on contagion are the rule, of course. A doctor who reports a case and quarantines the family is boycotted among the poorer class. Mrs. Pettyjohn is very kind, as you say. She is one who 'never takes anything' and thinks she could n't spread anything. So I'm compelled to warn you that she must not come into our yard, and Phœbe must not go outside these fences

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—not for five minutes alone. That, of course, I need not tell you.”

I said I should think it would kill the mothers who had a trained sense of responsibility — and sickened over the speech the instant after. He said nothing. His silences were the most effective part of his conversation. I was beginning to see that Nanny had married, if not a protector of the poor, something of a protector of his own. She had come of a self-centered family — I knew she could not have quarreled with him there.

He went away soon down the empty street; it seemed forlorn to see him go — out of his own house, the house of his joy and his sorrow. There was a perfectly good reason for it — unless he had slept in the room downstairs, the room with the bay-window.

XIII

NOREEN'S manner next morning showed what she thought of my conduct,—and who was to blame her? Mrs. O'Shea had very good ideas and inculcated them upon the daughters of her care with the metaphorical rod of iron. *They* were not allowed to roam the streets at night with young men they had n't known but a month-like! Mrs. Lavinus, on the contrary, claimed a sort of good-fellowship in the unlucky exposure.

"Some bosses think it's smart to drop down on you when you least expect 'em. I come pretty near being caught out, too, but I didn't have no young man along." She gave me a glance that was anything but severe. "I just stepped over to tell Mrs. O'Shea she need n't put starch in the baby's ni'gowns after this: I guess she took 'em for dresses,—they look good enough,—but I ain't strong on starch in baby-things nohow: lace scratchin' their little necks. I thought it might make her mad if I sent her word by Noreen. She did n't ask me to set down, though, and just as well—I had n't more'n got to the gate 'fore I heard Hing gabbling away to somebody—my, but he was reelin' it off! I guess he's been pretty near ready to bust this long while. Chinamen don't like women-folks round in their kitchens, baby or no baby. And there sure enough it was Mr.

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Maclay! I whipped into the house before he saw me. But it did n't make no difference. He never stepped inside the baby's room, nor even looked in. 'T was as much as ever he'd notice the baby when I brought him out sound asleep to show him, and his little mouth workin' for his dinner. He asked right away where you was. I told him—not to say where, because I did n't know (and don't this minute), but I told him who you went with. He took two strides up the stairs and sent Noreen down and there he set in your room maybe half an hour in the dark—or perhaps it was moonlight—lookin' at Phœbe, I suppose. Anybody could pity the man if he'd let you, but you can't say nothing to them kind. I told him, 'You need n't to be afraid to go in there,' I said. 'Everything has been put away. You won't see nothin' to distress you.' He looked a past me as if I was n't there. 'Where's Miss Bonham?' he says. 'Where's Miss Bonham?' That's all there was to my part! How'd you come off?—he seem much put out with you for keepin' him waitin'? He waited a good long while! 'My Land!' I says to Noreen, 'what do you suppose them two can find to amuse themselves walkin' the streets in this town after New York where they come from?—eight o'clock to ha' past ten!' I should have thought you'd 'a' been dead on the floor. And then to walk an' talk with him! Don't you never set down inside with your company? It looks funny strollin' about outside—men-folks may like it, but I don't believe your ladies would, if any of 'em ever come to call."

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That evening's mail brought a city letter from Mr. Maclay written on the paper of his hotel. It finished suddenly something he probably had had in mind, but would have postponed had he not taken a second walk later than our words together.

"I went up to the cemetery last night, after I left you. Now I know where you had been and where you sat 'under the trees.' Your flowers from her garden were still fresh. I have bought the hill with the trees. No one will touch the place now. Could you, without too much labor, with all that you have to do, make me a drawing for a stone to place there, just as you saw it last night? I can see something in my own mind, but I could not work it out. Let it be your own design, or, if you prefer, something adapted from your studies together, something you know she would have liked. The inscription should include her parents' names and her birthplace. I shall be back in about three weeks. If you are not ready to do this, wait. But when you are ready, will you try? Nothing that any one here could do, would be tolerable."

My heart sprang to the task. Now I felt that he knew what had been the bond; why I had come, and why I had stayed, unwelcome to those around me, distrusted and lonely and alone. . . .

There were in the house four volumes of "*L'Art pour tous, industriel et décoratif*." Papa had given them to Nanny. For of course I had brought her home, and it had been, as I knew it would be, a great "mash" between them, with the unfair advan-

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tage on papa's side. He, inventing preposterous compliments to give her practice in the art of receiving them, he said, which had not been a part of her previous education. She, blushing as expected, but keeping her mind quite level, above her shy, fascinated eyes, to the literary side of his Elizabethan persiflage. If she did not know how to take a compliment, she could recognize a charming phrase, even if aimed with monstrous hyperbole at herself. He called her "Diaphenia, like the daffydowndilly" — Heaven knows what he did not call her! — they were an amusing pair. He was really vexed by her marriage to "that fellow out West"; and he sent her these books and others from time to time, to give her "a few standards" in a world quite bare to his imagination. If she wanted a fan or a footstool or a mantelpiece or a door-knocker, here she could choose her *siccle* and her design, when great artists were also artisans. Her fan (fancy Nanny with a fan at the Doldrums!) could be an idyl by Gessner, her footstool copied from Dürer, such a stool as one of his grim Virgins might rest her mediæval feet upon. . . . And to this use his gift had come!

I went over the books that evening and found a suggestion of what I sought — in Vico's "Book of the Roman Empresses," 1557 (there are later editions) — the page fronting the life of the "lovely Julia," she who died, and her unborn babe, at the sight of Pompey's blood-stained garments — one of the casualties of her time. Stripped of its *figures décoratives*, stripped of emblems of the Renaissance and every-

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thing, according to the taste of that time, belonging to the family pride of the Roman lady, keeping only the lines of the sculptured screen at the back and the beautiful Classic-Renaissance lettering (this representation was not the actual tomb of Julia, merely a title-page of Vico's designer)—there was my memorial stone. Place it on the hill among her dreaming trees with the distant, restful mountain-line; let the evenings and mornings and nights and days be her visitors — whom she shared equally with those below in the new-digged spots, or in the sun-smitten graves of strangers, or the neglected plots of early families whose friends had moved away; — it seemed to me enough. I worked at it, when I felt fresh for the task, a good deal of the time while he was away.

In looking over these books I had come upon pencil-plans — of Nanny's, I was sure. They were all labeled, "The house at Silver City." Sketches of interior details, book-shelves, paneling, newel-posts, mantels:— Nanny could not have needed to label her own drawings of a house that had no rival. She must have printed those words for pure swagger, the joy of seeing them on paper: "The house at Silver City." So they had planned to build in the mountain-camp, taking the risks up there after those they knew in the valley town? A place she would have loved, and that I would have loved. This was the good time coming for which she needed to be "a tower of strength." Perhaps this house already was begun and Douglas Maclay, in his work up there, had its frustrate walls before his eyes to mock him.

XIV

MRS. PETTYJOHN did not take the refusal of her petition as gracefully as nature had taught her to do some other things. Nature flamed up in her heart, and she aimed her resentment at me. She had thought she had a "friend at court," she said: Mr. Maclay could not apprehend what there was no one to take the trouble to present to his mind—a busy man. But so be it! life was like that:—you have a friend—she is snatched away; you think you have found another whom you could cherish—she does not read you, she does not grasp what you say, though you pour out your heart to her—or, she is indifferent! 'Twas all the same—a hundred years from now. She could walk into a law-office out of the street and be married in a hat! The poor little *divorcée* had pictured herself in a wedding-veil, perchance the one she wore for Petitjean—and all the setting of a first appearance as a bride as good as new. And we had stripped her romance down to street-attire, or the alternative of the chicken-coop. She might even have thought to avoid the expense of a walking-costume and hat suited to her ideas of a justice of the peace wedding. Her mind was mixed of thrift and dreams of her second blooming, and there were many long hours of the long spring days in which to work up her feelings.

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On taking leave I spoke of her flourishing plants ranged on a window-shelf outside. I had come by the road around the corner of the lot, and they made a fine show to the passer. She sighed — "They take plenty of water. I have only these hands to fetch it, but even the poor must have a few little pleasures." I spoke also of a board that was loose in the back fence that divided our premises (strictly speaking that Hing had said was loose) and promised it should be nailed up. I feared it might irritate her, the sound of nailing boards from our side, against her, as it were. It did — even the apology.

"Ah, for the love of God! If you could leave me that one little convenience! It is the last — the very last thing I shall ask of that rich man. Name of Heaven! It is only to save me going the whole way round with my pails of water. It was in the deed in black and white that never, never shall that well be shut to me. Before I sign it the lawyer he read it to me: nobody has the right to do that — not if he own the whole Territory. If it is by the gate I come or by the fence — what is that to him? He never see me! It will not disgrace his family if I crawl through a fence and tear the clothes off my back to save my feet the hot road and me walking with my pails like a scrub-woman and meeting ladies that have called upon me with their cards in their hands when I was my uncle's niece, Father Lanfrey. I do not complain. Such is my lot. But I do not think it is too much to ask of that great man with his mines that never come near my place, and never enter the door I put

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between his child and the sight of them carrying her mother out of the house he deserted, like a man that was ashamed of death. And take her in my lap and tell her of the Mother of God, that she forget a few minutes what it means to lose a mother like she had. I would do it again a thousand times, but not for him, my God!"

And I was to brutalize matters still more (while of course granting the loose board) by mentioning quite pointedly that it should be replaced each time she came through, and if we used it we would do the same! The implication was enough — she followed me to the gate haughtily, and her lips quivered with words of scant civility, as she bowed without giving me her hand.

Hing had complained that the board never was replaced. He himself had nailed it up more than once and always found it open again, and now that the garden was sprouting, Mrs. Pettyjohn's fowls were a serious annoyance. When I returned from my call I investigated and found it as Hing had said; so my charge was not without foundation, even if our neighbor did resent it: she probably knew herself that the board was open at the time.

Little troubles never come single. I had scarcely entered the wedge that was to part us from Mrs. Lavinus (the doctor's visit, namely, and its results) when I found myself practically unable to let her go. Noreen had been told of the promotion that awaited her when Mrs. Lavinus's time was up — to my surprise she informed me that she intended to leave, herself, at the

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end of the week. I knew by her manner that she must have been tampered with. She could not meet my eyes and her reasons were absurd. They were, of course, whatever excuse she chose to give me.

I advertised for a nursemaid and after a blank of several days, with not a single applicant, came a number of remarkably queer ones. I seemed to have tapped the wrong vein as to service in the town. Persons I had never dreamed of unearthing came and soberly or shiftingly asked for the place of nurse to Nanny's baby. One brought a soiled check-apron protruding from brown paper and was ready to enter on her duties at once. Another was addicted to "fits" and said there was no warning as to when they were due. Others appeared to have come for the walk or to see the inside of our premises. And there were others, a few, with whom I did not parley nor dissemble. In short, there was no help in sight for us save the redoubtable woman my wits were matched against. She looked on, I may say, with her tongue in her cheek.

The Post surgeon whom I consulted as a friend in my extremity, advised me not to fly to ills I knew not of. He said that I might leave him to manage Mrs. Lavinus. I asked him if he ever had managed her. My manner, I trust, did something to show that the impertinence proceeded from my own despair.

"You can't watch her all the time," he said. "She needs to be bullied. That's the only discipline she is used to. It's a wonderful baby or it would be a sick baby now. He'll respond to the schedule like clock-

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work — you'll see. And she'll respond — to a few words I shall say to her. I have a stick to hold over Mrs. Lavinus."

The doctor, while he did not hold her (being who she was) morally responsible, might have held her technically so, I believed, for what had happened to his maternity patient in her care. If she could not be punished legally, her reputation could be injured. The surgeon at the Post stood above any suspicion of personal motives. It was a dreadful thought, but it came to me as the only explanation of the "stick." I did not believe he felt vindictive; he knew her kind too well. She would have had about as much respect for some of his most critical orders as if he had told her to go outside and stamp three times on the ground before giving the patient a drink of water. I knew he must have left as little to her as possible, but she was in charge: he had to work with her as with other instruments of fate that must have met him at every turn in his practice outside the Reservation.

He was a small man with a big-topped head and scornful nostrils, lean and dark from service on the Mexican border. I bowed to him in every particular and I enjoyed his slashing remarks. He was faithful but irascible. To Mrs. Lavinus his words were few; they illustrated the truth, which I have never disputed in her person, of the rude old saying:—

"A woman, a dog, and a hickory-tree,
The more you thrash them, the better they be."

It was a warm week, the first week in May. Phœbe was in short socks and Dutch-necked dresses, and I

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had fastened around her throat, which was tanned by the spring sun a soft pale brown, a chain of white coral beads, a little too long for her. It was one of my own trinkets of the days when it was part of my recognized business to deck myself for papa's eyes that took note of everything I put on and everything I wore with it. He had taken a book I was reading out of my hands because it had a yellow cover and the dress I had on was blue, not an artist's blue. "Primary colors!" was his comment. The dress was one Aunt Essie had given me which I needed; he swore it ruined his eye whenever I put it on.

Between our back lawn and the vegetable garden, and in one spot extending to the fence, there was a little orchard of perhaps twenty or thirty trees of mixed fruits. The grass had been allowed to grow where it would, or the ground ran to weeds beneath the trees, but peach-blossoms were scattering their petals impartially upon weeds and grass. Apple-blossoms were at their best, smothering the low boughs with clusters of beatific bloom; we were embowered, cut off from all but glimpses of the bamboo hedge massed in flickering green against the dividing-fence it was planted there to hide. In one spot it had been much trampled, and behind this was the board in dispute. I had not visited it often, but Hing reported that it was always in place; he complained no more of Mrs. Pettyjohn's chickens in his lettuce-bed, and so I regarded the incident (and the board) as closed.

That day under the apple-trees, I remember, I had been reading "The Grandissimes," a book that must

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have been written with tears and laughter. One can't help wondering why the Creole families in New Orleans were not enchanted with their ancestors in its pages? It seems they were not! We like, I suppose, to have our blood-relations taken more seriously themselves and some of their institutions not so seriously. But how the author adored them personally, who can help but see — and how adorable he has made them! I had got to the "Fête de Grandpère," intricate, delicious chapter, marvelously mixed, with cryptic allusions no reader is expected to more than half understand; but one saw the scene — the great "mother-mansion" of the Grandissimes, its belvedered roof and immense, encircling verandas "where twenty Creole girls could walk abreast." As I read I saw the "laughing squadron" wheel and disappear and reappear at an end of the veranda and challenge the group of young male cousins smoking on the steps. . . . I was far away and spell-bound, when the consciousness of a rather long silence where had been a succession of happy sounds caused me to look up and ask myself, "Where is Phœbe?" She had been skipping about under the transparencies of bloom that softened but did not shade the sun upon her upraised face and changing attitudes. How could I have buried my head in a book instead of gazing at her? What was there in Louisiana gardens lovelier than that picture which suddenly I missed. She was nowhere to be seen.

I hunted high and low. My next thought, after rushing all over the place and asking every one I

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met, was the fence. I went to the trampled spot — the board had been pushed aside by some hand stronger than a child's and left. I squeezed through into Mrs. Pettyjohn's back premises, bare and broom-swept and smelling of fowls. A poor place, neat with that pathetic surface cleanness of her kind that protests so much, but by the odors cannot go very deep. Phœbe was there, face to face with a big girl of nine or ten who had taken off the coral chain and put it around her own neck and was lipping it to feel its smoothness. Seeing me, she hastily undid the necklace and endeavored to restore it, but having trouble with the clasp, fumbling under Phœbe's long hair, she let it fall and ran into the house where I could hear women's voices in a gale of conversation.

It was a wretched incident. I washed Phœbe's neck and the chain in alcohol and tried to control my imagination. But Mrs. Lavinus, when we sat together at tea that evening, gave me the final stroke!

She was not nearly so unpleasant to sit beside, since the doctor had lambasted her. She took a certain pride in her enforced regeneration; her daily bath and clean apron and twice-a-week clean dress set her up in her own regard. Being now ranged with the sheep, she looked with corresponding suspicion upon her former goatish companions.

"I see that Briggs girl going in with her mother to Mrs. Pettyjohn's this afternoon. I'd like to hear what Doc Davenport would say to that! She was took out of school for scarlet fever 't wa'n't three

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weeks ago and I know it. If there's anything *in* this six-weeks' quarantine idee, whether it's a light case or a hard one, some one's in for a dose of it, the way that young one's let to run. Don't *you* say nothin' — I would n't want it to come from me. But I seen her all right."

I read no more "Grandissimes." The sight of that old green cloth volume to this day gives me waves of dim sickness of the soul. . . . All we knew was when to expect the blow if it came. The plan of the house made it difficult to cut ourselves off from the baby. It might have been managed, but who, under these circumstances, could undertake to manage Mrs. Lavinus. The doctor himself was afraid of her. That old war-horse, snuffing the battle, might break her bonds and go careering into the midst of our quarantine. I became suddenly hysterical as we talked of her. The doctor looked at me severely; he knew that if he sympathized, I should have to leave the room. "You must get yourself in perfect condition, you understand: if she's taken, you'll have to go out there."

I asked where?

"To the place on the mesa," he said.

We could not wait for Mr. Maclay's return before deciding what to do. His consent to what we decided on must be taken for granted. The doctor said "we," meaning himself.

"There is one thing that is n't going to be taken for granted: that's my nursing Phœbe," I said. "If her father is willing to trust me — after what has

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happened, then your orders stand, in my case — not otherwise!”

“You exaggerate, you know,” said the doctor. “But that’s natural. Keep yourself in condition all the same. Careful of your diet, and very careful of hers. And don’t worry.”

He rode out to the Doldrums and inspected the premises, talked over Mrs. Aden, the care-taker’s wife, into coöperating with her cooking, and gave orders how our scarlet-fever camp was to be organized when the blow struck (if it did), with help from the Adens that should not endanger their own children. This was a good deal to do, but all had been arranged when, in the very nick, Phœbe’s father came home. I saw him tested then — through and through, I should call it.

I don’t think he made a single comment in words upon my bitter confession. We stood by Phœbe’s bed (and the blow had struck). Her face was darkly flushed and the delicate little throat I had adorned so fondly showed the ugly marks of the Fear that had crept in under my slack guard. His answer was to give me the higher, the supreme trust — the fight out there alone for the life of his child. Yes; he made one other sign. He dropped the “Miss Bonham” and called me “Edith” as if he had done so all his life. That somehow sealed the terms on which we entered into this new and fearful test of amateur efficiency. I told him, of course, that I had never nursed anything more serious than the common cold of New York winters and the common sick-headache in my life.

PART III

THE WATCH ON THE MESA



XV

THE water of the Boisé River was being fought for in those days by irrigation companies little and big. Some were dying, some were dead, some were sleeping like the Eastern canal company Nanny had told me of, and some were crawling along as usual — these were the pioneer ditches of local ownership that could use but little water here below, but wanted that little very much to themselves. Few of the old settlers believed in the engineering talk of reservoirs in the hills to store the river's fitful surplus — not believing it, they knew there was n't enough water to go 'round, at the rate the big corporations were laying out their long-line canals with thousands of acres under them. And they were not friendly to the Easterners in a business way, though good-natured enough as man to man. Maclay was a mining-man and one of the sufferers by the break-down of the "Big Ditch," as it was called. He was if anything more popular personally for his losses, though losses on such a scale give a man away pretty badly as to his judgment. The misfortunes of our neighbors are nothing against them, if they don't explain too much. Maclay did not explain.

Douglas, as I was trying now to call him, sat in front with Aden; we were driving out to the mesa,

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crossing the wooden bridge from town to the desert valley beyond the strip of ranch-land under the old ditch east of the river. It was a heavenly morning, the river in flood booming along under the bridge. All the little fields we were leaving behind us were a mist of green and patched with crops just springing. The doctor had said that with so much fever as Phœbe had she could not take cold, but we had the window up between us, the pariahs on the back seat, and those who were responsible to the human family at large. Our side-windows were down, and as the breeze fluttered through intermittently, I caught a word or two from the front seat. Such queer, matter-of-fact remarks, between the two men; Aden risking his children on our good faith, Douglas taking his child out—and how should we bring her back again! They spoke of the old carriage, how it held its own after the years in the hayless barn at the Doldrums (since the establishment begun in hope had declined to the uses of waiting without hope). Aden said he used canned milk in his family, but we could get milk and ice from a dairy-ranch, and he pointed it out with his whip as we passed it. He was an Englishman of the plain people and no one was quite sure whether his name was Aden or Hayden, but it did n't matter: he was keeping his provisional word to the doctor and was even cheerful about it. He told Douglas that his wife was n't scared. She had a doctor's book which said just the same as Dr. Davenport did about giving the fever. As far as they had read up in the book, the doctor

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seemed to be about right. We'd all do our best and obey orders, and if anything happened, we'd have to take it as it come — implying that the ways of Providence are not writ in any book that man has learned to read.

We were in the very heart of the morning light, moving swiftly across the gray-green plain. The line of the mesa-lands, low at first with mountains snow-capped above it, now rose brown and bare (where ploughed ground had gone back to desert) close ahead and cut off the mountains. Also a windmill strode up against the sky. We drove in through a gate that stood open and I saw the long sweep on and up the bluff of two lines of skeleton poplars — those that had leafed out and died "when the May winds began to blow." The May wind was blowing now, but there was nothing more left that could die — unless I held it here in my arms. I choked as I heard that wind, the same that had haunted the silences coming across on the Oregon Short Line. Thrills of excitement shuddered inside me. This was my first stark responsibility for life and death, and one mistake, one slip of mine, one moment's forgetfulness, might ruin all the others' work and lose the battle. The fear of it almost stopped my breathing as we came in sight of the house on our slow climb, and drew up in front of a long, empty veranda opposite a door wide open into a room bare and full of light.

We went inside, and when I saw the clean, lifeless rooms smiling in the morning sunshine that flooded them through curtainless windows, I thought of the

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smiling dead alone with their mysterious dreams. The gentle ghosts of that house gathered in the emptiness, the wide, cool, peaceful rooms received their child. Little Phœbe stretched herself out on her mother's bed, turned easily on one side and slid into the half-delirious sleep of fever. We watched her a few moments and went softly outside for our first consultation.

It began with a man's notebook always handy, a bent head listening, and things, things! I knew a little what was before us, and all the way out I had been trying to remember not to forget—things I might need in the middle of the night three miles from town.

The house was the first sketch of a home. There was a very definite plan, but no architecture. It lay out on that long shelf of land, the main rooms facing the view, like dominoes placed endwise. The wing which the Adens occupied made an L at the back, and what plumbing there was, all the living conveniences, were with them. I had the big fireplace in the sitting-room, the chimney going up outside against the gable, and the two piazzas that made our halls of communication and gave us a few feet of shade. Nothing rose above the level of the mesa except the chimney, one or two stovepipes for the kitchen and the mighty windmill farther down the bluff, where it narrowed and fell away like a cape into the sea of plain. Grass and weeds and dead little poplars all seemed desiccated in the sun and wind. And there was complete silence save our own sounds about the empty

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house and the whir and clank of the windmill which practically never ceased and so became one with the wind which never ceased. Yes; there were occasional silences, when Aden unshipped the windmill in order to climb the derrick and oil machinery up there seventy-five feet from the ground. Then we heard the wind alone.

Our first precaution for the Adens took the form of a rope stretched across the front veranda part-way down; it was a little better than an imaginary line dividing the clean from the unclean, to put it strongly. On their side of that rope I never set foot nor they on mine. My supplies of all sorts, ice and milk, fresh water, clean clothes which Aden brought from town, everything went over or under that rope. Mrs. Aden slid her trays with my meals and the fever-diet under, and tapped with a cane on the wall. When I sent them back disinfected, I rang a little bell, which I used like a leper when I went out of bounds. In a general way I was n't expected to be seen around the back premises at all. I rang my bell also to summon Aden, who was our expressman to town. Every article we sent to the laundry had first to be soaked in disinfectants, and nobody could help me here. Well I remember the clank of those granite-iron tubs which I used to haul about and the weight of the sheets dripping from their bath of stinging chemicals. They were hung out on the back piazza facing the morning sun; Aden took them in when they were dry. As there were no pantries or storeroom in my part, I had to invent places for keeping things near by and these

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we racked our brains to defend from the pack-rat who was always with us. I can't say I ever saw but one of him at once, though legions seemed to besiege the house at night, but that *one* I have heard drop on the floor from scuttling along a wainscot-ledge with a thump like a large cat. By the doctor's orders, as I had never had the fever, my cot was in the outer room with the door open into Phoebe's room, but after chasing a pack-rat over the floors and over the foot of her bed one moonlight night, my darling screaming and cowering under the bedclothes, I moved inside and told the doctor why. He smiled! He was a sensible man—"Oh, well; *you* won't get it," he prophesied.

He must have elaborated the details of our quarantine with a fierce satisfaction. I can see now that he carried it to the point of absurdity. One terrible mistake had visited this family under his care—he must have set his teeth (those remarkably square, white, efficient-looking implements) on the resolve that there should be no nonsense now, and there was n't. Or if there was nonsense in the right direction, what blessed folly it was! We were the bond who alone are free. Our bondage gave us the right to ask the Adens' help with their own children as hostages. It gave Douglas Maclay the right to visit us, under bonds, each evening of our imprisonment, and those visits after a while, when she was n't too sick to care, were the best tonic his child could have had: whatever I wanted her to do all day she did that papa at night might know she had been "good." She cuddled

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down in the deep sleep of convalescence after the bliss of his good-nights — and it was only a look, or looks and words, across the barrier between them; for the sake of little brother's safety at home. She well understood the meaning of our bonds. But this was long later.

First, were the tired evenings when we walked the top of the bluff, he to windward of my blowing skirts, and I gave him the day's report and he schemed to my advantage, thinking of ways to save work inside. He supplied me with duplicate trays and dishes that I might take my own time over the disinfecting and boil my water in the cool of the morning, since it had to be done over an open fire. Kerosene stoves were smelly things in those days, and the wonderful nursing-conveniences that have come in with electricity were unknown. (Besides, we had no electricity.)

I reckon nothing of piling on details in this part of my story. Those six weeks on the mesa were the most searching experience of my life, and their consequences spread over many years that followed. As the mesa lay out there under the bare sky, so was I exposed and sorted and winnowed and beat upon in the glare of a mortal mistake crueler than many a crime. And as the shadow of the mesa at sunrise and at moonrise extended far across the valley, so over the subsequent levels of my life the shadow of that six weeks extended. Also the mesa joins on to a higher plain of its own on which it appears to proceed indefinitely till it reaches the sky; but the main thing about it to me then, was its isolation and elevation, in

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a stripped, stern way, above the whole plain of my former existence.

This is my apology, if apologies are needed, for a Swiss Family Robinson sort of recital, and I proceed. I had not enough clothes suited to the work, and through my masculine chain of communication with town,—Douglas to order, Dick to buy, Aden to fetch and carry,—a nurse's outfit was somehow provided. Plain short skirts and tailored blouses that must have been chopped out by the million in Chicago or New York, for the Western trade. But the touching thing to me was they were all white! With that high and haughty disregard for wash-bills which only a man can soar to, I was become a white nurse! Even the doctor looked pleased.

Collars I forgot; corsets likewise; sleeves were easily disposed of and had to be, as I was always liable to be up to my elbows in something. Shoes, as my feet gave out, were cast aside for a pair of moccasins somebody dug up from somewhere—it was Douglas who produced them from his pocket one night and sniffed their odor apologetically before handing them to me. They smelled curiously of a long life in the neighborhood of camp-fires and dried fish. We had a sort of dump below the bluff,—a scandal, of course, but we could n't hide anything, even our sins, in that place. I remember I sat down at once and clothed my feet in those soft, yielding treasures and flung my slippers with heels clean over the edge. And Douglas approved the act with a smile.

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And so all day and often half the night, I padded about the floors of my hospital, floors that I cleaned with my own hands. As I looked from room to room I sighed to think how prisoned, "cabined" Nanny must have felt before she found these ample halls of peace. She wanted only one thing — room, and he gave it to her; unadulterated space.

Silent, but not uncomprehending man! Even in a solitude like this she had dared to think of life with him alone. Was there anything more to be said about that marriage! I at least thought not. He had seen the one or two essentials as she saw them; he had known how to house her spirit living; he had known where to lay her body dead. I sheathed my sword of battle with this man (it had sneaked back some time before) — I took off my hat to him — though it's hardly the custom and I never wore a hat out there. And I no longer pitied Nanny even the long waiting and the dying crops; and when all was lost and abandoned and the dream was done, there could have been no ignoble regrets. It was a good dream and their arrangements with nature had been sound; only certain men did not keep their word, or could not, with certain other men. I understood the place was called "Maclay's Folly." I could not imagine that he would have cared what it was called.

I don't know whether Captain Nashe had given them to me or whether they came through my great scare about Phœbe, but in the strong light I dressed in every morning, I discovered my first gray hair —

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several of them, in fact. They could n't conceal themselves, for my hair is absolutely black, — soot-black, papa called it. He liked its smoky fineness and absence of gloss, and because it was crispy its whole length, it was easy to pack into any shape he desired. All studios are a stage, and in our day we have played many parts, my hair and I and every outward feature of me. I don't know what papa would have done without drawable daughters. Essie was the ballroom beauty, superb in evening dress : I had less avoirdupois and less beauty except to the weird eye of an artist, but papa thought he could do more with me in expression. He liked what he called the "sling" to my poses — I "slang" myself about those rooms to some purpose in those days. I used to wish (with that curious feeling that it was a lifetime ago) that the dear man could have seen me as I was now ! He would n't have given a fig for his Tahitian dancers if he could have drawn his own daughter with her slop-pails. I was certainly as brown as they. This hardened sort of self-consciousness becomes second nature if one is brought up in a studio. The outside of one is no more one's self than the garments one poses in. I had personated, off and on, most of the beautiful women in history, or classic myth, or poetry, ancient and modern : I had been Sister Helen, and Circe, and Isabella with her Pot of Basil — not for papa ! he smiled on literary subjects as he did on illustration ; but he never spoiled another child's game. One reason, I think, why he could draw from me better than from Essie was a

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slight suspicion that Essie smiled on *his* game. Her cool eye upon him when she posed for him, I could see put him out. He was never so absorbed as to lose his sensitiveness to the human eye, even the eye of a daughter. As I say, I had begun to think of my life in New York (not six months ago) as what old people call the past. Long and forever past, it seemed to me. I could afford to forgive its little grinds and ironies. Never again should I be able to squabble heartily even with Captain Nashe. I used to laugh aloud sometimes, alone with these back thoughts, with a sense of emancipation as by years or death.

I lived with the dead in those days, much more in reality than with the living. This ought not to be hard to explain, but I suppose it will be because my life at this time was not normal. No nurse, for instance, would understand its exaggerations of what to the profession is all in the day's work. What I call my *toil* out there, and the breathless, choking excitement of the first ten days when the case was acute, no white-gowned nurse, nor blue-gowned either, would understand, unless she were to go back to the beginning of her training. It was the beginning of my training in several ways.

Following this, with my child's convalescence, came the blissful reaction when I felt like the bride of joy. And with it a sense of immense floods of time, hours for thinking. I could lie awake nights for the pure pleasure of my thoughts. I had sleep "to burn." If everything was dead outside, and the house inside despoiled by absence of pictures, books,

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all signs of Nanny's life and presence there, it still was alive to me with memories — I dwelt in a memory-garden of my own ; and distinctly I felt at times that she was there with me. How else, I asked myself, had I done this which seemed a miracle? My patient had developed none of the *sequelæ* Dr. Davenport had threatened me with. We had no sequel to the inflammation that we fought in her little swollen throat. Nothing went wrong ; my own strength held out—it positively increased. Day by day I spent it as it was given, night after night I lay down aching in every muscle with the delicious pain of relaxation. And I did not catch the fever. I could n't, with Nanny on my side with the angels. Now I understood why nuns fret not at their narrow cells, why convent-life may give wings to the spirit : not without help, I thought, from the spirits of the blest. That help I felt sure I had. In short, I became a mystic and temporarily insane.

But, evening after evening, I walked the bluff-path that we had made ourselves, with Douglas at my side, not near me, and we talked a divine sort of common sense. I did not betray myself to him — my strange infatuation with my bonds : the long days when hardly a word was said to me or an eye looked at me but my child's watching me from her bed. Not as she had watched me at first when I laid hands on her life, but as I knew she had regarded her own mother, taking her as much a matter of course as the glass of water on her table or the march of sunbeams on the wall. When I went forth to empty my pails

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off the edge of the bluff, every being kept away. Alone I could stand and open my chest with great breaths of that air, and clasp my hands behind my head and look up deep into the amazing sky! Early morning, and evening after Douglas went away, I chose my time. Each morning the mountains were there inconceivably the same. The Owyhees swung down along the southern sky and where they approached the Boisé Mountains with their near foothills, there was a break and through it one looked far off into the Powder River country and saw the Blue Mountains of Oregon. As I knew very little Western geography these names were as new to me as names in a fairy-tale. All fairy-tales — except one — were tame to this. "And the evening and the morning were the sixth day," I used to say to myself aloud. I fancied I knew why evening came before morning in that stupendous record. Night is the constructive time when miracles are to be wrought; night for the mind and spirit, day for the body and will.

XVI

WE were nearing the close of the fifth week, our patient well advanced in the last stage called desquamation. The end was in sight, but Dr. Davenport took care I should go in fear of that end. In a few of his snapped-off sentences he taught me what breaking up quarantine means according to rules. The rules were pure technique; mechanical, he said, but the mechanism in this case was me. He frowned above his kind, tired eyes while he gave me a few particulars. Caulking doors and windows, narrowing my line of retreat until a hair perhaps divides the False and True — after the work inside was done, my patient purified and sent forth into Mrs. Aden's arms, my own caste restored standing on my island of sterilization — no part of me thereafter must come in contact with any part of the infected rooms except the soles of the slippers I stood in (as I had n't wings), which must be cast from the feet that wore them back into the room I was leaving, and the knob of the door I closed on my vile past must be clean — medically clean — before I touched it with my regenerated hand! It was like "the backward mutterings of dissevering power."

"You light your sulphur fires the last thing, you know. Be sure they are smoking well before you

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leave them. Each pan must stand on bricks or a piece of zinc, or you 'll set fire to the house."

"And then do I 'walk backward with rod reversed'?" I asked, to see the doctor regard me with professional suspicion as to my wits in this warm weather: however, he had gathered that my words were as chaff to the few grains of sense he could depend on in carrying out his orders.

I saw very clearly that I should be near collapse before my spells were done in those air-tight rooms after a scalding-hot bath and washing my hair. The doctor spoke of that incidentally; I wondered how he would like to wash his hair if he had a yard of it, with the temperature at 104°.

I listened with gibes on the tip of my tongue, but there was no frivolity in my soul. I made a list of each thing I was required to do and *the order in which it must be done*, that no back step should be taken, no step aside, no instant's forgetfulness — sudden mania I could not guard against. I began to fear something might crack in my brain at the last and ruin all. So, in these days, my heart began again that heavy beating that had made it difficult to swallow food all the first week out there, for I knew that for the "little son" Douglas now talked of so often, my last day would be the critical one.

When I spoke to him that evening of my lesson, he remarked, "Nice cheerful companion, that doctor of yours. Almost as pleasant as a hangman."

"I hang on his words!" I said. "He's the only man I ever obeyed absolutely without question."

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Hence, according to the popular ideas about women," — I had n't thought ahead in this sentence, and Douglas looked at me as if he scarcely cared for my jokes about our little doctor—literal-minded man! *Two* literal-minded men! Never had I spent six weeks with such a pair. I plunged into metaphor—sacrilegious metaphor—to hide my confusion.

"‘When this corruption puts on incorruption,’" had fresh meaning for me now, I said, and oh, that it were possible while still in the flesh we can't escape from, that we might be immune forever from one or two other things—!

"From what?" said he.

"‘From too much love of living’" — I don't know that he knew I was only quoting — "‘from hope and fear set free.’" I heard his long, deep breathing like a sigh of some inevitable tide. It was a long time since I had said anything wantonly like this to hurt him, because we had talked of those blessed common things. I had grown sick of other kinds of talk—extremely sick of my own last words.

But all these slips of the tongue were part of the fiendish way in which, from the ambush of our very security and triumph, what we call inanimate nature suddenly sprang upon us and made our last days hideous. Every day a wind arose—quite usual, Aden said, at this season. It came from somewhere east of us as from a furnace-mouth wide as the horizon; it made its own atmosphere, thick and yellow; it burned the back lands to cinders and ashes and scooped them up by the acre and flapped them over us, sweeping

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the mesa in its path and blotting out the valley. We tore from room to room shutting doors and windows ahead of it, but it descended on us like the vomit of a volcano. The air smelled of it, our food tasted of it, its scum was on our water-pails and lined our wash-basins; our hands were gritty and our clothes not nice to touch. Mrs. Aden came and wailed to me across our rope of the state her part of the house was in, and I wailed back of mine. The piazza-floor under our feet bore out the tale; it was white as a sea-beach. Phœbe wandered from room to room, overheated in the closeness and tired of all her games. I felt like rending my garments and casting ashes (but that was n't necessary) on my head.

Perhaps an hour it lasted! Its recurrences were the burden, and its results in extra cleaning at trying hours. Each day when the Voice said, "Peace, be still!" it slunk away or died somewhere in the desert. Its demon-life was no more. At sunset fell silence; celestial colors bloomed along the yellow, bewitched horizon, and after these faded slowly came the night. We rose each morning made anew.

Phœbe's room was oddly, charmingly lighted by a band of windows opening like transoms near the ceiling; the rooms were high-studded—there was no second-story. They opened above the piazza-roof into clear sky. It put me in mind of the beautiful studio-light at home. Sunbeams in the morning, moonbeams at night marched along the walls. Phœbe caught the sunbeams in a hand-mirror, sitting up in bed, and scattered bits of rainbows about the room like flowers

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from the skirts of Iris. All the goddesses of the morning were with us when we woke, and one immortal spirit was with us all the night. . . . I used to whisper it to myself, her little common name — “Nanny, Nanny!” — such a homely little name for one who now inhabited “the lordly halls of death.”

That they were suffering in town, too, I judged by Douglas's appearance when he came out to see us, and by the way he stretched himself full-length on the bluff and welcomed what to him must have seemed our peace and cool immunity. I did not say too much about the wind — it was our last week; Nanny must have endured it when it was much worse, with fresh-ploughed ground for half a square mile around her. He brought the mail, and flowers that had wilted against his horse's neck. And he looked wilted and spent himself, when he flung off his spurs and carried my druggist-parcels extracted from saddle-bags and coat-pockets, and spread them out on the veranda-parapet to amuse Phœbe. It was broad enough for her to squat on it Turkish-fashion and play store, with her customer lounging and smoking outside at a smiling distance; also very Oriental. No purchase was ever effected between the two; there was endless chaffering, but everything remained in stock, and bedtime closed the bazaar. Phœbe was a little lady about bedtime. She was not greedy with her cup of pleasure — reluctantly she set it down undrained; another night, another taste. On the threshold she would look back and kiss her fingers to him, little fatal fingers! She was fair with her new skin and

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the bloom of a child's marvelous recuperation — so lovely and so unsafe!

“‘Rappaccini's daughter,’” I whispered to him one night. He smiled — he did n't know the lady nor pretend to. I owed him constant apologies for my language of old quotes. Like a camel far from water-pools, I was forced to subsist on such refreshment as my brain-system had stored. He grudged me nothing, neither did I apologize.

One day—it was Saturday, I remember—the Adens went to town taking their two children and leaving a big clod of a boy from the milk-ranch to answer my bell. That day I had a special but not divine visitation, unless it was one of Wrath. I rang and rang the bell when I saw it coming—no one answered. Clouds of winged ants (I did not know them from the plagues of Egypt!) bore down on us from the north. Our chimney was their port of call, it seems, but how should one know it was only a call? The top of the chimney soon was black, or red, with them, embossed as with moss or ivy. Bunches of them broke off inside and fell down on the hearth and burst, as it were a bomb, into myriads of the little red mites that swarmed up the walls and furniture and over the floors and over me. I ought to have had a hundred brooms and fifty pairs of hands—I had only one, but I lighted a great fire and swept ants into it, as Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine swept their way o'er the deep to save themselves from drowning. I did not, like them, fear sharks—but, as I say, the creatures were all over me! I nearly burst my heart in that

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red-hot Armageddon when the tribes of ants came up against the power of my broom. I dealt with them as Jehovah and I felt the peace of divine vengeance after wiping out a few millions of them (as I hoped), those misbelievers in their right to roost on my chimney!

This tale I told to Douglas as we sat on the edge of the bluff that evening. I had expected him to be amused, but his mirth exceeded the demand. It struck me as inordinate. He rocked himself and lay back on the bluff and rolled with laughter. It was ridiculous, in the face of darkness where we sat. I had never seen him in a paroxysm, of laughter, or of anything before. I was annoyed with him. Presently he sat up and said, in the language of the country: "It's not what they eat up, it's what they tramp down!"

I did n't know that *he* was quoting, and I did n't think it very funny (and don't now)—but that was the way we talked—only half understanding each other in words, but with a very good understanding somehow underneath.

Then, seriously, but with amusement still twitching the corners of his mustache, he told me in effect what a goose I was. Winged ants, like other winged things, have their appointed way, and are no more to be turned aside from it than crawling ants. They had n't wanted to fall down my chimney; merely that rock in the midst of the sky was n't big enough to hold them all. If I had simply gone out of the room and left the veranda-door open, by the cool of day they would all have vanished.

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As the moon rose later and later, he stayed later to get her light riding back to town. He would question me from time to time: "You must be tired? Won't you go in when you are ready? I should like to spend the night out here on the ground if I could! My room in town is Gehenna." He was still at the stage-hotel.

I praised in this connection the plan of our bedroom windows which spared us the afternoon sun. "We bless you every night," I said.

"It was n't *my* plan."

We were both silent for a long while (it was Nanny's plan he must have meant). The arm that lay across his chest went back on the ground like a flail. He turned on his side away from me. Very slowly the light of the full moon began to show in the distant valley beyond the shadow of our hill. It touched first a pennon of dust from some late freighter crawling in to Boisé.

"By the way," he sat up suddenly, digging his boot-heels into the ground and leaning his arms on his knees. "Grant would like to come out to see you. He's been hinting for some time, but I keep forgetting to ask you. Would you like to see him?"

"I shall see him next Sunday, I suppose," said I.

"No; he'll be up at the mine. If you wish, I'll tell him to come out some day early next week. Is that right?"

"Yes. But let him know the rules. Hailing distance — tell him to 'speak' us and the captain will

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answer. 'The bark Edith and Phœbe forty days out from Boisé, homeward bound.' "

Why did I say it! He dropped his head an instant in his hands — "homeward bound," to him! But he took it very gallantly with something about a long voyage and a "hot ship" for us, implying we had suffered on the trip.

"No," I disclaimed; "it has been a wonderful voyage — and if we have n't found the Happy Isles, I've found a better place, a sort of Soul's Rest. Have n't I heard of a town out here by that name?"

"Not very near here, but the same sort of 'rest': wind and sun and high dry plain."

"Well, I have found out here something that I had almost lost — the 'power to dream' — to dream of her."

"Do you mean literally — to dream —?"

"No; but I think Phœbe dreams of her and forgets and does n't know why she is so happy when she wakes. If you don't mind, I'd like to speak of her, just once?"

"It would be strange if I should mind your speaking."

"I have always been able to see her very clearly; I suppose it is what is called visual memory. But I lost her somehow in Boisé. On the little poplar-walk, sometimes, I could see her — but out here it all came back. I have a garden of memories planted on this hill — every flower a thought of her. Flowers like that don't grow in crowded soil — they need solitude and concentration with the one idea. Then

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it becomes more than a dream ; it is vision ! And you — I have felt, believe me — what this place must mean to you ! I am careless sometimes in my words ; perhaps because I am so sure you must know that I know ! I have taken you into my garden, just as it might have been with us three if — if — !” I rose and he was on his feet too, and without thinking he started to offer me his hand. Then, of course, I drew back and he remembered —

“Keep me in that garden,” he said. “And if you lose her again we’ll come out here for — our souls’ rest.”

This was my last night of happy thoughts on the mesa. Of course it is no way to tell a story — in dark hints, and very likely the wise reader has guessed already what was coming. But I was far from that sort of wisdom — any approach to it in my thoughts would have been an inconceivable insult to the man and to myself. I can never be too thankful that I was not wise — was in no respect on my guard ; that the shock when it came found me just as helpless and left me just as crazed : as a bird that has chosen a safe crotch for her nest hid in the heart of the tree, and has spent days adding a straw or a feather or any bit of another’s waste that is precious to her that can use it, and gone on happily weaving her nest and filling it with dreams, fears nothing in the future, sees no warning in the sky, before the wind comes that tears the nest from the tree and strews her hopes broadcast on the ground. She too is crazed with her loss — hopeless where or how to

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begin her life anew. She circles with cries about the place of her life's tragedy. What matter to her if the wind that bloweth where it listeth knew not of her nest — nor understood the ruin that was left in its path.

I was extraordinarily happy that night — so happy I could n't stay in bed. When the moon had crossed the zenith to the side towards the valley and her light came in through the high west windows and struck upon the wall above Phœbe's bed, I took a blanket and stole out of the door onto the back veranda. The Adens' wing shut in that end near the door. Out at the far end towards the north one saw dim hills where the canal-line cut its way through, making a white gash. Eastward the plain that joins the mesa went back in desert land or ploughed land returned to desert; at night the mountain-line withdrew, the whole earth disappeared as it were and the sky was paramount. Stars, millions of stars, and the great soaring path of the Milky Way amazingly white and sown with sparks of light defying the moon. The wind blew soft and steady; I heard the prosperous tune of the windmill go on and on, but I could not see its bulk against the sky; it was too far down the bluff behind the house-wing. Only the five dead poplars, which must have been quite trees when they were planted, whisked about in the night-gale like witches' brooms. It was n't beauty — it was a lofty loneliness that resembles the sea, far inland as we were. I began to feel how people who have lived in such places can never go back to the old values of

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life in villages and towns; they must forever be the "gypsy-souls," homeless in the paths of men. . . . But I was no longer homeless; and by the blessing of God I had earned my home. All would be well when we went back to the house in Boisé: no more explanations for conscience (or vanity) to make and for pride to withhold. My paymaster was a man of good counsel and a friend. Phœbe was now the child of my arms as well as of my duty and my will. She had found her own way to those arms when she needed them.

She had asked me those questions — about her mother — which the daughter of a skeptic dared not answer. I had given her allegories, fairy-tales, verses from the Psalms. She was not satisfied. The little lonely soul retreated within itself and answered its own questions. But when she was able to sit up and be dressed, yet her strength not returned, she would get into my lap, we would hug up to each other, she would find a place for her head, and her long legs would dangle, but we were most, most content! We rocked and told stories and sang scraps of old songs and said bits of poetry, and one day I repeated to her: —

"Motherless baby, babyless mother,
Bring them together to love one another."

Her arms clasped me closer with a slight shudder: she was a child of a remarkable precocity of feeling. "Say it again!" . . . I said it again and many times over, and it became a charm to rest on in the face of what I learned must have been the ancient, nameless

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dread after the child of mortality has heard of that thing called death.

"*You* won't go too?" she asked me. "Please, don't go!"

"I won't go—ever, so long as you want me, dear."

"But I do want you. I don't want that—to happen to you that happened to mamma."

"It won't happen to me, and I shall not go away."

We kissed on that promise, pariahs as we knew ourselves, dangerous to the rest of the world, but safe in each other's arms. Next morning she smiled across the beds at me: — "'Babyless mother!' here's your baby!" Was it any wonder I felt that I should leave the mesa richer than I came?

XVII

NEXT day was Sunday and we made a special toilet for papa. Often on Sundays he would come early and loaf about the veranda half the day, making rude toys we could burn when we left the mesa, fixing up little conveniences for our routine: he made a bed-tray for Phœbe's breakfasts; he made her a stool to carry here and there, as we were short of chairs and those we had were heavy; he made a paper windmill that stood in the window-casing and "talked" to us, as she said. It fluttered and talked all day, but papa did not come. Towards evening the watch became acute; like persons adrift on a bit of wreck searching the horizon for a sail — such hunger I read in the eyes of Douglas's child. Every spurt of dust that moved across the plain we thought might be his horse galloping towards us from the river; it always turned north long before it reached our shelf of land. Had it been his it would have gone out of sight for a few moments and we should have heard the clink of hoofs and great hot strides before it reappeared, first a horse's head and then a rider topping the bluff, and the rider would wave his hat and hail us with the shout Phœbe loved. I can hear it as I write — but I shall not try to reproduce it on this page; it was a raucous, a primitive call, a note for the open and the wild. But we both loved it.

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He did not come. Mrs. Aden had prepared him an extra dinner and kept it waiting ; night closed over us, moonless and the sky was fathom-deep in stars. There were a few tears when bedtime came,—late bedtime,—but my little girl was an angel of forgiveness. Papa “could not help it” somehow, and of course he had no means of sending word.

When he did come there was no call. I was struck cold by that silence, even before I met his changed expression. We were outside in the house-light from a window that pierced the dusk, and he handed me a telegram, his head uncovered, as we stand mute in the presence of sorrow. He went away then towards the stable and I waited a moment before opening my message. I knew it meant papa — my father who wrote no letters, gave no sign, yet was loved just the same. As Phœbe could forgive her one day’s disappointment, so the older child forgave a whole lifetime of disappointments little and great in the well-beloved, and knew that somehow “papa could not help it.” . . . He had died at Papeete and been buried off-shore three miles from land, under the flag of France, which he loved next to our own, and in the sea that owns no flag. Papa always hated the custom of moving the dead from place to place. Captain Nashe had cabled Essie, from whom my message came ; she would send me the details when she had them by letter. I wished that we might hear no more. Buried in the sea ! Of course he would never be buried “plain.” . . . But it should n’t have been — not for ten years more ; and I should have been be-

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side him, and those years might have made his fame. It was unforgivable of fate to cut us apart in this senseless fashion. And it is not the prematureness alone that hurts; it is the manner also. We demand that the greatest thing that can happen to us should be done, not dramatically, but decently and in order. One may live picturesquely, but death is an old institution.

I knew it must be now in the newspapers with smiles going round, sad smiles among his friends at his incorrigible quaintness. Ah, well; I had no tears! I wandered off and sat down — lay down — on the dry hill and ached with it. The ground held the long day's heat; it comforted one like the heart of mother earth. As it happened I was dead tired that day — for no reason unless it were watching a child's eyes grow tired with waiting, and the adorable patience with which she controlled her tears. I had wondered what she would do when her father, whom she had grown so to depend on, went back to his mines again. I drifted away from my own instant grief — it would last: there was no need to press the realization. I could almost have fallen asleep as I lay there, with sorrow for my pillow, worn out with the pain of an old regret that washed back and over me and drowned even the pang of this final loss, the end of all regrets. And then, hearing Douglas's step, I roused myself to meet his sympathy. He had taken the telegram and of course he knew.

He came and sat down beside me, a little nearer than the terms of quarantine allowed. I knew that he

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was looking at me, but I did not wish to speak nor to hear him speak of my loss. He would think of it as grief pure and simple; it was less, yet much more than that. And then he said something, and the words at first conveyed not the slightest meaning, unless the shock of what directly followed those first words struck back and for the moment numbed my understanding.

This was what he said: "Edith, I wish you would let me take your hand. I must have a serious talk with you—even to-night! It is a great intrusion, and it is very difficult to—to say. It would help me, that sign of your trust—that I must count on if I am to go on. Will you give it to me?" He held out his hand.

I was so astounded that I thought I could n't have heard him. But naturally I did not give him my hand. It would have been more natural to have asked myself could he suddenly have gone out of his mind.

"You have trusted me in other things—I hope you will trust me now." Here I turned and we faced each other. Even in the dusk I saw his pallor, and the strange, hurt smile with which he met my amazement. What in Heaven's name was coming!

"We are going back next week and I wish you would allow me to announce our engagement. We cannot go on like this. You must come to me altogether or you will be driven from me. And I need you."

That was all—I felt as if stones out of the sky were rattling on my head. If the whole hill that instant had been swept away beneath us, the world

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could not have changed for me more than that speech of his had changed it. Earthquakes are easy to understand. . . . I don't know what he saw—I hope he saw something in my face that stopped him. We continued to look at each other. He drew in his breath, and I could hardly gasp:—

“Wait—till I think a moment.”

He waited. I began to count, saying to myself feebly, “How long *is* it? March, April, May,—we have been out here six weeks. Is it even four months! Call it four—” Suddenly, as clear as print before my eyes I saw the inscription I had been working on those weeks he had been away; the letters I had spaced and measured and traced in pencil and inked in black—I had followed an old form of wording used on the stones in the family graveyard at Lime Point, names and dates going back to the early seven-teen hundreds:—

Erected by Douglas Maclay
to the beloved memory of his wife

ANNE AYLESFORD
daughter of William and Phœbe Gurney Aylesford
born—

The drawing still was mine—I would burn it as soon as we went back. Nameless be the grave of Anne Aylesford, forgotten in four months! . . . To him I said—“Could n't we put off this ‘announcement’ till we might at least call it a year? A year is common: plenty of men think a year is long enough to wait. Did you think I would listen to you in less than a year? Why, I must be rather easier than the

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easiest!" There was silence and I cried, "Do you know what I mean? Do you understand anything!"

It was impossible all at once to grasp the full measure and significance of this infamy. I trembled with my own impotence to speak as it deserved. As I turned it from side to side and its consequences spread, blotting out every peaceful certainty, every hope of that future I had counted on, I must have raved!

I remember pouring out things like this: "My father, you know, is dead: that was your telegram — it seems ten years ago, since what you said just now. I believe you did say it? You asked me to marry you — that was what you meant?" He did not undeceive me. . . . "Nanny, Nanny!" I cried, "I shall never grieve for you again. Six years was enough — she could n't have lived with you six years without knowing what she had married. She must have seen all around and through you and known there was nothing there. She must have died of that emptiness — before the accident of death. Slow shock to her whole faith and being. And she must have known that if she did die, if by any chance she slipped out of life, that chance would be your opportunity to show every one — to make hideously public — the cheat her marriage was, the poor imitation love you gave her. Thank Heaven, if this insult must be hers, I am the woman who shares it! You might have spoken to some one who would miss the whole meaning of it, or not try to make it plain to you what she felt — she might not think you

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worth it ! but only laugh at you as the world laughs at widowers. I have laughed at them, but I don't laugh at you. I know that you are well worthy of my scorn ! Because it is you, and because it was she, and for that matter, because it is I, this thing is a tragedy. We — the perfect Three ! And what comes next ? ”

I had paused, but he did not speak. Silence between us was unbearable ; it gave more chance for thought to burn new places in one's consciousness.

“ You have cut the ground from under me ; you have insulted what I came here to do ; you make it dishonorable for me to stay — But I shall stay ! It was my promise to Nanny, it is now my promise to Phœbe. She loves me — she shall not be wrenched from one to another as soon as her heart begins to cling. Whatever you have said to me, whatever I may have been that you should dare to think you could say it, that does not touch her. I shall see to it that it does not and you shall help me. I shall stay for Nanny's child — even if I am in the position a woman like Mrs. Lavinus thinks I am in, knowing the world, and widowers ! ”

He uttered one word — “ God ! ” He got up and went away — back on the hill, where I heard him walking up and down, stumbling now and then. I sat still and wandered and stumbled too in the dark confusion of my thoughts. What was left I had blindly hit upon : Phœbe was the sole ground between us now. It was sacred ground and we might still (now that I was warned) keep it so. To remove

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far from her consciousness this wreck we had made of our part of the compact; to find some basis on which to communicate as to our duties to Nanny's child, or my duties; — *that* remained, and to keep out of each other's lives henceforth.

As he approached within speaking distance I looked around and summoned him. "Please come back," I said. "Sit down — I will be quiet. We have things to talk about. We begin all over again now."

"Then let me say one word!" he interrupted, and I thought in his hawk-eye — the eye of a creature mortally hurt, but full of scorn of pain, of death — I saw an indignation equal to my own; also a man's human rage against a woman whose tirade he has listened to until he could seize and choke her into silence.

"This is not *anything* you think it is! It is a blunder. You will hear no more of it. Dick will be out at the end of the week to move you in — I shall be up at the mines. After this I will do what I can for you at long range; Dick will be my substitute."

That would not do either, I said. Dick could not be his substitute with Phœbe. I fairly beat the ground in my despair.

"You cannot mean that you desert your child! She must see you. You don't know how she has grown to depend on you. You must come as you promised her, and I will keep out of the way. There must be some working basis we can meet on — we are not children to refuse to speak! Men who dislike and despise each other do business together for

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money reasons. With Phœbe for our reason I should think we might do the same."

"But you are not a man, Edith. There is a side to this question you do not understand, and I cannot make you — nor will I try!"

"You thought it would be easier to marry me, I suppose." No; taunts would not do, and I must not be cheap; nor dared I antagonize him any further. How terrible that I should rob my motherless Phœbe of her father too, who was good enough for a child's undiscerning love. Unhappy man, devoid of all the heart's understanding! When one is civilized up to a certain point, rage, even long-sustained reproach, becomes habitually impossible. One has to learn to hate and revile as one learns to love and forgive. I looked at him — he was just the same, and I had grown to care very much for his kind of looks; his features had pleased me as I came to know the expressions they were capable of. And there he was, unaltered! He looked as tired as I felt — as despairing; leaning forward, his arms on his knees, crumbling the dry grass in handfuls torn up from the ground, milling it in his palms and sifting the dust between them. The incredible things I had said to him it hurt me to remember, though he were the very Judas of friendship and good faith.

"I know," I said, relenting, "that we don't speak the same language in some things, and I am willing to own that I may have been morbid — perhaps overstrained, out here alone; but we ought to try to understand why we have hurt each other so horribly.

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I hate my own words! May I show you my excuse for them?—lay my reasons once before you, calmly, reasonably—then we will agree to forget it. I seem to be going mad when I think of what you have said to me, but I am not mad. I cannot suppose that you are—that you should call a thing like this a ‘blunder.’ I can’t let it pass as merely that! Will you listen?—Let me convince you that I am not mad, that what may be common in the world is not common to every woman’s thought.”

He listened as patiently as I could ask.

“First, there is my father’s death—that has become to me in the last half-hour like an old, accustomed grief, because of this ‘blunder.’ I do not exaggerate—I cannot help stating it just so. Sorrow is no longer a thing to complain of in a world where a man like you can call—what you said to me just now—a ‘blunder.’ Then, Nanny—that is the same thing; I am reconciled to her death. This has done it. It seemed untimely, but she had got all the happiness she ever could have had. Death at any age is not untimely, when life is out of joint, though it may look fair enough outside. You see, I knew her, though I did not know you! That seems to cover the case so far. But now for you and me—what we might have been to each other. Not the perfect Three—that was denied us; but we might have been the perfect Two. We might have shown what friendship can be between a man and a woman,—young, free, respecting each other’s freedom, doing our work apart, with a sacred trust to share. It

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was a dream worth dreaming. All that goes into the discard. . . . Then, closer to the soul of things as I thought we both felt it, — do you remember how I took you into my ‘garden’? (was it only last night!) and you said, ‘Keep me in your garden,’ and if I lost my dreams again, my dreams of her, we would come out here — for our ‘souls’ rest.’ . . . I hope never to see this place again, — never to think of the time that seemed so blessed! I thought myself blest — safe, at least, from insult and desecration. All that I see now in my garden is the man I took in there and showed my secret paths and the places of the spirit they led to; and suddenly that man became as one mad, and trod on all my flowers and tore up my precious memories and trampled the garden of my heart into one wild ruin and went outside and laughed! That is what you have done — to her, to me, to us both, and to yourself as I thought I knew you. Can you understand that when you call a thing like this a ‘blunder’ you really drive me mad!”

His chest lifted hard and slow. He got upon his feet heavily like an old man. . . . “And now,” he said, “if this is reasoning together calmly, let us calmly curse and swear! You have called me a four-footed beast, and I feel as if a delicate fiend in hell had been sorting me, with fine pincers. If you think there’s any part of me you could have missed, go on — don’t spare me. I am the damned.”

He stood a moment as if literally awaiting my next experiment — he gave me plenty of time — and

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then he walked away. After a silence that might have been long or short—it was something of a blank to me—I heard the clink of spurs and his horse's shuffling tread following at a walk, then a pause at the hitching-post. I could see him stroll on a little way till he stood looking off where the road drops down the bluff. It was a night clear, dark, marvelous in stars. He looked up at those stars. The moon was not yet risen. I shivered all over, but I could not weep—not though I had slain a human heart in the torment of my own.

His voice when he spoke was as quiet as the night. "Forgive me: I had forgotten your telegram. You would like to acknowledge it?"

And I had forgotten that acknowledgment! It would have to be dictated, and I could not frame the words as he stood there waiting. He seemed to see my difficulty.

"Give me your sister's address and let me send your answer. She knows where you are, doesn't she—how you are situated out here?"

I had written her once from the mesa. As my letters had to be disinfected, I wrote but few and they had all passed through his hands. "She will understand," I said, and thanked him.

He paused. "You have some hard days before you. Breaking up a quarantine is no easy job for one woman alone. Grant will bring you out the stuff you need for the last day; have you got your list ready?"

I said the doctor had it, the medical part. "But"

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—I was forced to go on — “will you take down the things we shall need to go back in, Phœbe and I? Mrs. Lavinus will get them ready.” He stood there and wrote to my dictation, in all the terrible intimacy of our estrangement, every personal article we should need to wear:—I would sooner have gone back wrapped in a blanket. The light of the window where he stood writing showed the short hair blown boyishly across his forehead, and his features drawn, whitened, aged in an hour.

“You will remember — about Phœbe?” I said.

“I shall be apt to remember Phœbe — among other things,” he answered, without looking at me, shoving his notebook in his pocket.

“But it’s not remembering in the right way if you don’t come to see her. She has been promised,” I kept harping. “How can I explain your absence if it goes on?”

“Nothing can be explained,” he said. “As for what you expect of me, is n’t it a little unreasonable? You cast me into the pit, then you tell me I must come and play with Phœbe. . . . Dick will be out to-morrow, if I can get hold of him. I shall not see you probably for some time. Phœbe will not suffer; — she loves you now, as you say. She must learn to do without what was her father.”

It was a great surprise when he came again next night. I wished, for Phœbe’s sake, I could have known that he was coming. There had been a sad time over this second disappointment. She had cried herself to sleep because I could make no promises for

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the future either. She was quick to feel the change in my own spirits which, for utter weariness, I could not hide.

I don't know why he came so late and cheated Phœbe, unless he dreaded another evening with me. There must have been some strong practical reason for his coming at all.

"Don't be afraid to speak to me: I'm not a man"— He addressed me in an offhand way—"I'm what's left of a man who died here last night, by his own hand."

I retorted hotly, "Considering what did happen here last night, I should think we might use plain English. Do we need metaphors?"

"I don't—this is your language I am trying to talk."

I saw what had happened, for much the same thing had happened to me. We had both said impossible things and recoiled from them without being really repentant. His wrath (and mine) had settled on its lees. This was the clear wine of resentment iced with sarcasm that he offered me. I did n't believe he was the man to use sarcasm as a habit to a woman, a child, a servant, or a dog, because none of us will bear it. He used it only to finish all chance of natural words between us in the forthcoming interview, which *he* would n't bear. As soon as he began upon our business he was himself, only a rather more familiar, careless self, as if I had broken some delicate bond of restraint, set free the man as a man talks to anybody—to another man. But perhaps this also was studied.

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"Dick is n't able to come out. He's laid up for a while. He's at the house. Mrs. Lavinus is taking care of him, for his sins. Yet she's not so bad these days."

"What is the matter with him? Is he ill?" I asked, thinking of contagion.

"Oh, no; an accident—with a pistol. Dick's rather an ass."

"Is he?—with pistols!"

"It was pistols this time, or a pistol. He'll soon be out again. I hope you won't mind a little crowding? He's in the sitting-room downstairs."

"Has Mrs. Lavinus time to do justice to the baby and Dick too?"

"Oh, yes; there's heaps of work in the old girl if you know how to get it out. Davenport manages her. . . . Well, I'll take myself off, and to-morrow it won't be Dick; but don't promise Phœbe any visits. Thursday I'll be out to move you in; the carriage has been fumigated. You must get busy early in the morning, by daybreak—to avoid the heat, though you can't! Plan it so you can do your heavy work before you begin caulking doors and windows. You'll stifle in the last hole!"

"I wish I could die in the last hole! What are we to do about Phœbe? I'll go anywhere," I prayed,—"do anything you say—except leave her altogether. But she must see you! She'll pine away! Two disappearances in her life—*Will* you tell me what I can do!"

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“Do what you are doing, Edith. No one could do more. Only just please leave this other thing alone. It's there! It can't be helped. But we can try to keep sane.”

PART IV

TRYING TO KEEP SANE



XVIII

WE were moved, but we could not know for a few days yet if our breaking-up had been perfect. The little boy, whom we watched in fear, remained very well.

Dick's wound was progressing also. It had not been serious enough to keep him in bed, still it must have been painful, and painful to his feelings as well, of a young man supposed to be not unacquainted with firearms. One saw that he did not care to be questioned about it. He roamed the house and grounds, bored and pale and looking handsomer than ever in his soft-collared shirts and white trousers and his left arm in a sling. Phœbe returned with joy to her "Dick" when she found him again on my bureau. She was much interested in the real Dick's bandages and must have the same for Hermes, armless as he was. She hung a doll's petticoat around his shoulders after the manner of Dick's coat with one sleeve tucked in.

The baby slept out of doors now, in his carriage, or in the jalousied end of the piazza. Mrs. Lavinus seated beside him, mending whatever she could be trusted to mend very badly, looked on at Phœbe's play like a large bird of the wading species invited to a feast of wood-warblers. Dick and I made our little jokes about her: we called her the "Listening Crane"

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(though that was not her figure), and undoubtedly she listened. Dick and I were supposed to be playing an older game. But Dick's heart was in the right place; he could hardly have given it Mrs. Lavinus, my only rival on the premises. It was as certain as June is June that he must make love to somebody. Mrs. Lavinus, I think, had begun to like me; she took some trouble, at least, to warn me not to waste the flower of my days on a youth, however handsome and pleasant, who could n't have more than a hundred and fifty a month and sent fifty of it home! Mrs. Lavinus always seemed to be posted as to the main chance. In the midst of all this, I went about feeling at times like a gibbering ghost, at other times jeering at my own ghost for retaining a preposterous and carnal interest in the fresh fruit and vegetables which now loaded our table. Hing, won over completely by that six weeks on the mesa, hovered over me and my appetite (which really needed no petting) like a mother with an only child. His queer, high-pitched tones fairly coo-ooed when he spoke to me.

But Phœbe's delight in the freedom of a whole yard, in the old places recovered which meant home, in the cheerful human noises of the house all day, in the green grass and the flowers and the street-passing outside our gate—all this was pure joy to watch, and a relief I had not counted on. For I saw that she did not pine—at least not yet. No memories of my own poisoned past could affect the triumph and satisfaction I might now give way to: Phœbe in perfect health, nay, even better she seemed than before her

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fever, and the little boy past all danger of taking it from us. We had not brought back a single germ.

"You're a wonder!" Mrs. Lavinus pronounced one day. She had strolled in her free fashion into my bedroom while I was doing my hair, the door being open for the draught. The sun was in the west just at supper-time, shining through my closed curtains, and I, in the thinnest wrapper I possessed, was melting!

"Your hair looks kind o' dry and your skin's browner, and I guess your hands are coarsened up some with those dissyfectants, but you might be a girl of twenty as you stand there! And I know you must have done some work in them six weeks you been away. Just how old *be* you, if you don't mind me askin'?"

I told her my age. — "Twenty-seven! and I set you down for twenty-four at the outside. Well; I admire your not hidin' it. You don't need to — you're a good looker. Dark folks last longer than fair ones, and you got the sort of features you can do anything with — it don't matter how you wear your hair; I've seen you all ways and I never see you look plain. That's the truth."

I dashed into my closet for a dress, and the wrapper being off, Mrs. Lavinus (who was in her way a student of how the Lord has made us, sick or well) inspected my arms and shoulders. "Well; you're a picture at any age! You don't need to worry, unless you're thinkin' of a man younger than yourself.

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Take my advice and hold on for a rise as the saying is. You might not have to wait so long!"

I was hurrying as fast as I could, but her tongue pursued me.

"Land! don't I know 'em?—them widowers! I've seen all kinds. There's one kind—you can't blame 'em, let 'em marry as soon as they would. They just got to! Take a man with his livin' to earn, gettin' up to work at six o'clock and no fire made and no breakfast got and a passel of young ones bawlin' to be dressed and fed—they can't afford to hire help. I've helped 'em out myself for my keep, and poor keep it was, and picked out a wife for 'em and 'most done the courtin'— But there's others with no excuse acts just as common. And there's the sly kind, awful solemn and indifferent, but they're thinkin' just the same. There's a mighty difference between live folks and dead folks. Unless you shoot a man and bury him *with* his wife, he'll sure be lookin' out for another one. They're made that way. . . . And, my land! if you could see what some men'll do to their wives when they're livin' you would n't worry about the wives that's dead. No; there's many a woman envies them that's underground for good, and wishes number two was in their place."

"Mrs. Lavinus," I broke in—I could n't leave her till I was dressed and everything I needed to complete my dress seemed to have hidden itself in places beyond discovery;— "tell me about Mrs. Pettyjohn? Is n't she married yet?"

"That one!" Mrs. Lavinus threw up her hands and

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brought them down one on each broad knee. "She's as much married as she ever was and no more and don't need to be. The French fellow did n't show up and May went past and it got to be June and she was in a fever and mortified to death, and who should come along but Pettyjohn all dressed up lookin' like a sport. He's got hold of something in the minin' way where other folks puts up the money. They've went off camping on their second honeymoon as good as the first one. She lived with him six years contented enough till that money was left her and she went traveling and met the other one—I don't mean to say there wa'n't no interval, for there was—but nothing to hurt her going off with Pettyjohn and no ceremony about it. And did n't need to be! That's what the Catholics was so mad about. And they did n't like the looks of you bein' hand and glove with her as she claimed—wanting to lend her this house to be married in, the priest's house. Married! Everybody knew, if Pettyjohn should come along in time with a good job, she'd be willing to help him spend his pay. As for *her* money that she says he threw away—'t was she gave it to him and was as wild as he was to put it into every wild-cat scheme they heard of. This here's a pretty poor lookout they got now, some thinks, but it'll last, likely, till snow falls in the mountains, which is where they've went."

I had listened with patience this time, and I went downstairs reflecting on a few things; for one, how it is that your very thoughts are known to the women in the same house with you, I had never mentioned

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Mrs. Pettyjohn's solicitations, nor my wish that they might be granted. She, of course, had boasted prematurely and made much of our few talks, as she had to me of her intimacy with Nanny. In any case my character in Catholic circles, which included Noreen's respectable parents, must have suffered.

I had not been down to the end of the yard, but now I went with a sense of relief. The fence was gone; the bamboo waved free, with a space of light beyond. There were no more fowls, and no more flowers. A stained flannel shirt and a pair of blue overalls hung on the clothes-line, property of our new chore-man, washed by himself. He lived in the little house now, one of the lone birds of the frontier who pass for bachelors. I took an inhuman satisfaction in his freedom from every visible member of my sex, and from all evidences of the presence of one of them inside our bounds. Dick told me that a horse for my use would be kept in the stable across the lane between us and a small meadow where he was now at grass with no shoes on. It sounded like a home on a basis of security and comfort. I knew it was all false. But it was "playing the game."

One day, in the afternoon, a man in working-clothes came to the front door and said he had a piano outside which Mr. Maclay had ordered sent up to the house, and asked where it should go. The dray stood backed to the front door and the house was in the confusion four men and a piano can make in a small passageway, when another sort of vehicle drove up with a spanking team of well-kept mules before it. I

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knew it as the ambulance from the Post in which the officers' ladies went on calls and errands to town. A smart orderly opened the gate of the poplars for a lady, who entered as if she might be the first lady of the land, as she was the first lady at the Post, Mrs. Forth, wife of the colonel in command. Not that she assumed it—she simply looked it in a frank American way, perhaps a Western way, which was very good-natured and a trifle humorous.

I perceived as she came up the walk that the world, of dress, was with us. She smiled as if we had always met in this way, with a piano and four perspiring men with hats on the backs of their heads (one had taken his off and laid it on the piano) blocking our entrance.

"This does n't look well for my mission," she remarked, after a moment, indicating the piano. She met my eyes with an air of confidential mystery.

"Really?—a mission?" I asked. "And I hoped you had come to see me."

"Oh, I have. But I've brought my mission, or commission, from your aunt in New York. You are not too busy—with pianos and things—to have a long talk with a perfect stranger, all about your own affairs!"

Having included among our visitors at the studio some of the queerest as well as cleverest persons in the city, as well as other cities, I was prepared to take this lady and her "mission" just as they had happened to come, and to be very much entertained.

"How nice that we can talk outdoors," she began,

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as we strolled forth into the shade. My "aunt in New York" was certainly the last person I should have expected an introduction from to a lady in Idaho, but army people are from everywhere. If she meant Aunt Essie, I felt sure of a lively talk before we got far into that topic.

"This is a pretty place." She looked around from the bench where we sat under our deepest trees. "I've often stared in as we passed. It's a regret to me now that I did—pass; that I was lazy about coming in. We've been stationed here a long time. When we first came your friend, Mrs. Maclay, had gone out to that dry ranch where you were in your quarantine. She had lived a good deal in the country, had n't she? The town, I think, had been rather too much for her—the flood of first calls in their friendly, pioneer fashion, perhaps. We all expect to go through with it. By the time Mrs. Maclay came back to town, the feeling had gone round that she did not care for calls, or at least she did not return them always. She had good reasons, no doubt. . . . Now, I'm going to talk to you as if I had known you all my life! I've heard you talked about in New York—I've been there all winter, you know—till I feel that I do know something about you."

"I don't know that that follows," I could n't help saying. "It depends on who does the talking."

"There's a great disturbance about you among your relatives, and I think there would be more if they knew all that I've heard since I came back—from all sorts and conditions! Dr. Davenport, of course,

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speaks the truth. I've never heard him say so much about any human being in my life as he says about your six weeks' campaign on the mesa. He ought to know! The other talkers we'll leave till later. I may be frank?"

"Oh, frank! I have n't listened to a woman's frankness — to a woman who knew how to be frank — I've forgotten what it is."

She detected my involuntary passion of emphasis; the note of estrangement from one's sex and kind. "Well; there are certainly several sorts of women's frankness. As for men — they're poor, deprived creatures. They go about halfway with their frankness, which is n't half bad of its kind. But they get muddled and we have to guess the rest. And we are sure to guess wrong. I'm going all the way with you! May I even speak of your friend —? You have stepped into the same tide of raw brute circumstance that she met out here. The West is tragedy to some women. We must n't let it be tragedy to you, too! Mrs. Maclay, I imagine, was very, strong, very self-centered, very indifferent, perhaps, — where I'm not sure that we who look on should allow you to be indifferent. I am here to open your eyes to a point of view you may have met in second-rate novels if you ever read them, or third-rate plays. But here it is genuine and honest and it makes in one way for good citizenship. We've no classes, but we have public opinion chopped out to fit the masses, and which makes no distinctions in individual cases. I don't know very well what I'm talking about, so I don't expect you to. . . . But, to

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illustrate: Mrs. Maclay was called 'peculiar.' I suppose she was about as peculiar as you are, or as we are up at the Post. But we are a family by ourselves; we talk about one another, but we don't talk outside, and outside talk does n't affect us.

"I've come to ask you, first, in the name of your relatives, to go back to New York. And if you won't do that, to come into our family — our little army-family, and let us environ you. You've been at the mercy of the town and the town-talk long enough."

"But the town knows nothing about me!"

"That's just the point — except through your servants. We'll come to that presently. No: we'll come to it now! You must get rid of that dreadful old woman you have here. She has simply sowed the whole place with stories about you. You will never get any decent help while she is in the house, and she proposes to stay, you may be sure. That is the object of the stories — to frighten everybody else away. She's a little scared just now by the shooting, and she may keep still after this. But the mischief is done."

"I don't understand — what shooting? You don't mean Dick Grant's accident?"

"Accident!" she cried. "Do you mean no one has told you? Well, well!" She colored a little — "I suppose I've put my foot in it now! You did n't get the papers at your ranch? Dick, of course, is n't boasting — and Douglas Maclay is pretty tired of Dick just now. You see I know them both. But the old person of the bibulous name — has n't she ex-

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ploded with it? Well; it's a man's way, the whole of it. To set you in a place where you're exposed to affairs like that and say it is n't so! And try to persuade you that you're as safe and protected as if you were in your aunt's house in New York!"

"I've not been in my aunt's house in two years," I cried under this fire of frankness. "And I've never been 'safe' in New York, if you mean safe from gossip. But shooting is another matter. Do you mean that some one shot Dick?"

"I do — two days after I spoke to Douglas Maclay about you — well, as frankly as I'm speaking now."

"I hope not."

We gazed at each other —

"I am an old friend of his," she answered my look. "And I could n't get at you, and my 'mission' seemed rather pressing just then. I had been hearing the stories, and that nobody was calling on you — in a town like this! But when I heard that Douglas Maclay had taken you out there to his ranch across the river and was riding out every evening —"

"He did n't, Mrs. Forth! It was Dr. Davenport's orders that we should go, arranged before Mr. Maclay came home."

"Then the doctor ought to be around to say so! It need n't be said to me. The male gossips in the saloons here never heard of a six weeks' quarantine for anything. They laugh! Can't you see?"

"I refuse to see. I see your 'point of view,' of course, but what has it to do with me more than with you?"

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"Because your environment out here consists of two men, very nice fellows, but there's no special brand on them to the town. They can't protect you. It's just a character novel of the plains, and we are the characters. And a dangerous mixture we are. I sent for Douglas Maclay and took more liberties with him in ten minutes — than I ever shall again if we both live long. I informed him what *he* had done. I told him your relatives in New York were in a state of mind about you and that I should do my best to send you home, and that he must resign you — in view of what — of what I told him. And meantime he must do what he could to change things — "

"Please, one moment, Mrs. Forth. Did you meet my sister in New York, Mrs. Landreth? You have n't spoken of the one relative there who does know all about me and is *not* asking me to come home. Because she knows why I came and that I must stay, or do what would be worse than anything the town can say of me, from our point of view — which, after all, is the one we have to live by. In the army you don't believe in desertion, do you?"

"I did n't know you had a sister in New York," said Mrs. Forth, dropping her voice and looking puzzled. "I saw a good deal of your aunt, Mrs. Charles Braisted, a delightful woman — talk of frankness!"

"But I hope you don't mean to add her frankness to the kind we have out here — that is, when I'm under discussion, as I seem to have been."

"Don't you like her?"

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"Of course I like her. But I don't ever do anything she says. We've always been her despair, my sister and I. She disapproves of everything we do without knowing why we do it or being able to tell us what else we could do in our circumstances, which are not the same as hers. But of course she's delightful, and if we were n't her nieces she would think we were delightful too. Her idea for me is to live with her as her secretary — she would call it that. What she wants is to see me dressed in a certain way and married to some one rich. There's frankness!"

"And I thank you for it! You're very generous to pay me in that way. For of course I'm horribly scared. But I promised, you know, — I promised your aunt I would try. She seemed to think letters could do nothing compared to the spoken word."

"Aunt Essie's letters could n't, for she never writes any. Anything she can't telegraph, or delegate to another's words, goes by default. I simply mention it as one of her sides — she has a great many."

Mrs. Forth responded to my smile rather absently, and I saw we were done with "my aunt." Something else lay back of my words, and, I fancied, something else was in the back of her mind. She asked me — in that manner of thinking aside — if I was sure I could forgive her meddling with my affairs? I said — also thinking aside — that I minded nothing, only the talk, the talk! Not so much the talk of the West, which was a wild and picturesque travesty of the truth, as the talk of the East that came so cleverly

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near it as to be almost mistaken for it — by those who talked. That had been poor papa's style of analysis: it amused, but it did not help to enlighten.

"Well," said Mrs. Forth, "I've offered my credentials, and you won't receive me as a special envoy from anybody!"

"Only yourself. Come as your own envoy and come often. Oh, do come! This has been a most illuminating talk!"

I certainly was excited, and she was too keen not to have noted how little the main object of her visit seemed to affect me, compared to some obscure relation it perhaps bore to something deeper in my mind than the disturbance among my relatives or the gossip of the town. I knew she was dying of curiosity as to what had happened out on the mesa, if she were not in her own conscience guilty therefor.

"But I want to know more about Dick Grant." I returned to the safer topic, "What has *he* been doing in my affairs? I'm getting puffed up with all this attention of the town — after this I shall never talk of anything but myself."

"Dick only did the chivalrous thing. He knocked a man down for saying disrespectful things about you and a friend of yours in a 'public place.' You observed, coming over on the Oregon Short Line, how 'public' we are! This thing might possibly get into a Salt Lake paper! The man was one of the kind who 'carry a gun.' He used it — that's all. I don't know that he meant to kill Dick, but that's immaterial — Dick will not appear against him."

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"I wish Dick had left the man alone. I don't wonder Mr. Maclay is tired of him! Is it really possible we are expected to take that point of view into account?"

"Mrs. Maclay felt as you do, my dear. As her friend — forgive me — but you step into her disfavor with the town. They are prepared to find you 'peculiar' too. She had no Mrs. Lavinus; but you may be sure there was talk — more than I could have heard — when she went out there and lived alone with her men and her maids like Marianna in the South. Marianna did n't have any maids, did she? Perhaps Mrs. Maclay did n't — It's not understood here why anybody should want to shake the dust of this pretty little town off their feet and go and live with jack-rabbits. There's no real love of the country when it's as big as this. The poor lone humans have had all the solitude they will ever want. It's rather nice and kind of them. I'm afraid you're not very kind?"

"Only to jack-rabbits," I said. "I'm a sister to jack-rabbits — and winged ants."

"*Was* Mrs. Maclay peculiar?" Mrs. Forth looked at me as if slightly in doubt whether we had not both been a little "touched," according to the popular understanding.

I agreed that she was peculiar, in a certain attitude of mind. She had it very strongly without knowing it — it was a family attitude and she had not traveled enough to be able to see her own people. But she would have preserved the type in her little daughter :

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broadened it to suit the change that was coming gradually in herself. It would have been a long process and she would have got results. "I think she would sooner have lost the child by death," I said, "than seen the type in her cheapened, or go down. She wanted my help and I came; and I shall not go till I have done what I came for, or know that I am no longer needed. I will not give in to the local point of view, nor to any distorted action from a bigger point of view that may spring from it—in those who *do* give in."

"Are you thinking of my present 'frankness'?" said my visitor.

We smiled at each other. She knew I was not, and that I had no intention of telling her of what I had been thinking. Distinctly I was wondering what that frankness might have done to Douglas Maclay, exposed to it as I had been. What could a man say—how could he explain—to a woman with a tongue like this!

"In short, you intend to show fight?" she asked.

"I intend to stay and mind my own affairs—and get rid of Mrs. Lavinus as soon as I can find a substitute who is no worse."

"That's where I intend to help you—" But she paused. Evidently she had something further on her mind, or perhaps her conscience. "I wish I'd seen you sooner—well—before I plunged into my mission with Douglas Maclay. I like him so much! We've known him a long time without ever knowing him at all really. *He* is peculiar! and he's very unsocial.

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I made him come up, when I could not get at you — and I drove things into him."

"I don't see what there was left for you to drive into him, if the whole town was doing it?"

"He never would have heard it—not a word—any more than Dr. Davenport. But what I told him Dick's affair confirmed short and sharp. He's hard to impress, but I believe I impressed him—with Dick's help."

"I think you did!" I remarked to myself with a shiver.

"How much of the time does he leave you alone here with Dick and Mrs. Lavinus?"

"All the time, since Dick was hurt," I answered bluntly, for really I was becoming weary of my new friend's excessive interest.

"Dear, dear! the town won't bear it. A young woman, and a young man notoriously good-looking and popular (and your own looks are no defense), and two widowers, neither of them past forty. It won't do!"

"Was that what you drove into Mr. Maclay?"

"I and the town—I used better language. To you I speak as the town, because I see you are not half enough impressed."

"Who is the other 'widower'?"

"Dr. Davenport."

I laughed, as Douglas said, like "the damned."

"The baby, you see, was never really sick (this is how it goes), yet you had the doctor down here every week just to have another man to talk to. Another

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suspicious thing about you is you talk to young men you have only just met, in French, or some language the servants can't understand; which to a woman like Mrs. Lavinus is about the same as whispering — things not fit for delicate ears like hers to hear. Well; you must get rid of her. I've got a splendid woman for you — that's another part of my mission. She's a regular 'Nanna' trained in England. You can have her just as soon as Major Kennedy gets his orders. His children are a little old for her, and she does n't want to go to Arizona. Meanwhile, if you intend to stick it out, you must let us see all we can of you. I want you to teach my young ones French. . . . And will you come up and dine with us Thursday night? Half-past six — we'll send for you? And — how about smoking a cigarette with my husband after dinner by the fire — or even with me!"

I could laugh now. "You certainly know all there is to know! But I smoked my last with Dick and gave him the case to commemorate the sacrifice."

"It does n't go with the 'type'?"

"Not with the Aylesford type."

"Is there anything else I can meddle with, sticking my finger in your pie?"

"There is one person here I do care about! Noreen O'Shea is a good girl whom I thought something could be made of. It would be bad for her to believe these things in a horrid way. You see there's some foundation for them all!"

"We'll get her back for you, when we've rid you of La Vinus. What a name! Do her habits support it?"

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"Somewhat—for a time, I think—till Hing, the Chinese cook, complained to Mr. Maclay of our ale and porter bills and he shut down on all stimulants for the women and children of his household."

"Oh, dear! It's as good as a play—a low-down play, but so funny—with you and Dr. Davenport and Douglas Maclay in it. I could weep tears! But you'll think me as rowdy as all the rest of us."

I was thankful she really had her handkerchief to her eyes just then, for my face must have looked very queer. She glanced at her watch—"The ambulance will be here at a quarter to six. Does your little girl have an early supper?"

At six, I said; but we could go in and have tea at the same time. We heard the wheels of the heavy ambulance just then, and she said she would not keep the ladies waiting who were with her. "I would n't let them come in; they'll call later. My mission was on my mind. And now it's off, I wish to say I'm delighted you are n't going to run. I hate the white feather."

"So do I, if it comes to that—"

She interrupted me, as we were walking towards the gate—"Men have rather crude ideas of how to 'protect' us, haven't they? Or perhaps their ideas don't advance. They think they can't do anything for us but fight for us or marry us. When they can't do either, what are they to do! I would n't answer for any man under those conditions."

Her remarkably keen eyes were on my face, not rudely; but the confounded blood that tells so many

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lies, and occasionally tells the truth, flew all over my helpless countenance. I could only hope she might think it meant Dr. Davenport, or Dick ; even for her imagination it would have been too wild a flight in the other direction. But I was relieved when she had gone.

XIX

I LONGED to be alone and think over this extraordinary first call! Phœbe was rather fractious at supper, for Dick in the parlor was drumming one-hand accompaniments and whistling "Golden Slippers" in a manner too distracting. She finished finally at his elbow, still in her eating-apron, pursued by me with last drinks of milk.

The piano had been left without orders in the bay-window, where it could n't stay. After supper there was a union of forces to move it to a better place and a disunion of tongues as to where that place should be, Dick and I being the contestants. It was dusk before I escaped at last to the ditch-path, and even then Dick followed, to make his peace. I told him I had been talked to death that afternoon by probably the greatest woman-talker in Idaho and my heart was steeled against any more conversation. He said he could be as silent as I wished, and I retorted that one silence is company and two is a crowd. This was not coquetry as it might have sounded, nor did Dick set it down to ill-temper — his own was too sweet for that. He took himself off with reproachful looks, but I was steel to them also.

Such a knot as my thoughts were in it gave one mental pain to pick at! Was it any excuse, even if Mrs. Forth had provoked this thing — goaded him

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into the madness which he came straight to me with and perpetrated — as if I could understand and bear it! On the other hand, *I* was not mad: suppose he had acted the part of a baited bull with darts in his hide and a cloak over his horns plunging at the barriers — could I go on and class him as one, in our future relations? I knew I could not and should not be able to treat him so when we met again. And was it true that I believed Nanny's spirit had died within her, watching this man as her husband? — that she had been glad to go, but for that sure foresight of the exposure that would follow when her death gave him back his freedom? I did n't believe it, of course: it was monstrous. I remembered the peace in Nanny's eyes when she talked of him; her humorous yet appreciative allusions to his habit of silence. But where was the exact line between his madness and my own? Is evidence even of the senses to hold against that mysterious inner testimony of soul to soul? On the mesa those nights when our thoughts lay bare to each other under the bare sky, how could he have cheated me! Incredible, outrageous as the words were that I had heard him say, somehow the man himself, in some deeper way, still kept my respect.

I think it rested, as to evidence, on one fact which also was of the senses. He had never made love to me by word or look. After such a girlhood as mine no man could deceive me nor creep up on my defenses unless I chose. I would have detected the first sign of such approach. His savage reasons, whatever they might be, I honored as against that sickening

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defeat of character through the senses of which I had accused him. Brutal as his calculations had been, they were cool, they were mental; he had n't even been obliged to put on the curb. His heart was coldly with the dead, my blessed dead! And here I had further evidence, and it clinched the argument finally between his soul and mine brought up for judgment in the mind's tribunal, which may not be after all the court of last appeal.

On the evening after the day when he came back, and I had to meet him with my confession, in the midst of our concentrated talk in preparation for our flight to the mesa, — suddenly he paused and got up and moved around vaguely and said, not looking at me, "Did you make — did you have time to make the drawing I asked you for?"

I went and fetched it and gave it into his hand on the drawing-block as it was, covered with thin paper. I watched, because I was jealous to be sure if he felt it, if he would feel it as I did every time the name, her name, met my eyes. I watched and I knew — by the hard breath that caught him like a sob. He turned instantly and went to the window with what he held as if to see better. There was only night outside! He was alone with it and there was no one with whom he could share one pang, one word. I left him, satisfied. He had loved her then — not six weeks before the monstrous thing that happened on the mesa. . . . And in the interval, not one word, not one look had transpired between us that I, or the angels, would have had recalled; a record of pure

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good understanding. Acquitted! — of the baser infidelity. No charge was left but that strange brutality of the man's practical mind which no woman can ever understand! As I saw it now, he had trampled on his ideals for the sake of certain living results and had expected me to meet him by trampling on my own. He would have said, perhaps: "Our ideals are in a safer place than the world here can know, but *we* know, and so that we trust each other, what does it matter!"

It certainly mattered to me. I would have met him in another way: I would have been pilloried beside him in the eyes of that world, and called it glory to be so in the name of a friendship and a loyalty as proud as ours might have been. To spare me the pillory — was that the idea? — to spare the living who could be hurt, to sacrifice the dead who are safe? — I could hear all his man's argument. He owed me, Nanny's friend, his protection in an exalted sense since I had come unprepared and stayed and cast in my lot with his, in this unparalleled loneliness, for the sake of Nanny's child. The whole town was tossing my name about; friends in the East were hurrying to my defense — "They can only fight for us or marry us" — that is if they want to keep us. "And I need you!" he had said. That was the other side of the man's argument.

Being settled in my mind that these were his reasons, I threw them all away as too desperate and utterly preposterous. I gave up, from the point of argument — still he did not love me! Safe from that

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insult, the rest might go. But with it went the dream of that perfect, proud understanding. He was as other men. We never did understand them. My father had been a mystery often to his own children, perhaps even to his wife. God has made us perversely different to give room for the last effort of the heart; long patience and practice in forgiveness, with no hope of understanding! They know not what they do, and we know not what we do to them.

Peaceful days followed, or days that should have been peaceful. To me they were hot and colorless and empty, with that sense of loss which means there was not much to lose after all. I felt a longing for my own old set, the talkers. Tired as I had been of them often and their talk, impatient of their egotisms, their self-conscious dwellings on one topic, themselves; — still they had imagination, if they chose to use it, they had subtlety — they pushed and crowded, but they did not trample. They fluttered and flapped and darkened the air with cries or with counsel without wisdom, but they did not attack with hoofs and horns and lowered, brainless heads. Give me no more of these strong and simple men! — they were God-forsaken idiots. They were the “deprived,” as Mrs. Forth had said. No; I must remember now that so far as friendship went I was in a place that knew not the word. I was alone.

Dick, of course, was a child. I gave him the honors of his chivalry in my defense — as I tried to forgive Douglas his stone-age protection. His wound would trouble him for some time yet, but he went

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back to work, such work as he could do, carrying another wound, as it is sentimentally called. I could have staved off a regular proposal, but I knew he'd never be satisfied till he had got his answer. It was some time before we were "by with it" altogether; perhaps I was too gentle with him. Dick had been very good to me. And it is true I had encouraged him—but I had no fears for his future or that he was doomed to a homeless existence on my account, nor even on my dear Nanny's. These harmless little masculine tributes go with us on our way; one ought to be grateful for them while they last.

Dick's chief never came and I adduced, of course, that he was living up to his word. It was a surprise and a great relief that Phœbe did not pine! Indeed, I believed that of those two he must have been the defrauded. She was not faithless, but she was six years old and well and happy, and new friends had come into her life, the first of her own age she had ever had. She was much taken up with the little people at the Post; there were rides in a goat-cart and there was a pony and an old trooper who buckled the blanket and surcingle and held the rein and ran at his side when the children rode him, and set them on again when the pony shook them off; and other thrilling adventures connected with visits to the Reservation. Isabel Forth, as I now called her, had justified her interference in my domestic and other affairs. Thanks to her I had my English nurse and Noreen too. Worthy Mrs. O'Shea had a great respect for "the military." Seeing me on visit-

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ing terms with ladies at the Post and dining with the colonel's wife and teaching her children, she concluded, I suppose, that appearances had deceived somebody. Through this one and that one, good Catholics all, the return of Noreen was diplomatically achieved without loss of prestige on either side. As to Isabel Forth, my rapid intimacy with her was not friendship — my idea of friendship — it was one of those wayside flowers of fancy and homesickness that spring and bloom in the long heats of a frontier summer. She was, of us two, the more rapid bloomer, though I should not say she was quicker to fade. It is now rather as a dried flower of fancy I find her image in my records of this time, still colorful and faintly pungent; there is much tenacity in these pressed flowers of memory unless one handles them too often.

Besides the dinners and the French lessons I had other errands at the Post. Isabel had begged me to start a little dancing-class, having surprised me one day in the act of giving Phœbe her first positions. Hardly any one knew of my loss — no one who knew it from me. I did not go into mourning. There were sad and sordid reasons against it. My railroad fares had been advanced by Douglas Maclay; to be sure, that was not Nanny's way of putting it, but it was mine. The money must be paid back or saved for that purpose, month by month, and enough more piled up to take me home, if the time should come when that would be the next step before me. Who could say what the practical male mind might lend

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itself to next? Something I felt was coming; the ground was too queer and shaky under my feet. I felt it coming in the long, hot days, and short, windy nights of starlight, or of waxing, waning moons.

As the summer grew old, Isabel and I had our first quarrel. I love to dance and by nature I can, — though not better than Essie. Papa used to play for us in the right hour for exercise up in the studio, and we, at any age, and in any sort of costume he chose to array us in, used to caper about the big place to the rhythmic beat of his improvisations. The music, and his hand raised and his eyes upon us, led the movement he wished to inspire us with. It gave us our best physical development and by degrees it led to ball-room dancing, in which, however, we had less practice. The quarrel began with Isabel's pride in our lessons and her craving for spectators. It was ball-room dancing I was supposed to start the children in, but we had our interpretive attempts. Such dancing is called by high names now. They were an exceptional group of children to teach and our progress was beautiful to see. Among those who came to look on was Dr. Davenport with his kind, tired eyes and rather savage smile, and a curious intent gravity which had struck Isabel, but I was too busy to notice him.

"Some day" — this was our quarrel — "Dr. Davenport will up and ask you to marry him point-blank! You won't know anything about it till it happens. And you'll go up like fire and refuse him and you'll make a great mistake." I looked at Isabel Forth, but

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she is not an easy person to look down! She continued: "There's no one to compare him with professionally but the best. You need n't stay in the army if you don't like it—he's in it for the love of it: his boys in barracks and his army mothers and little children in the wilds. He has a private fortune. He lost his wife twelve years ago and he has been a most dignified—"

"Widower," I supplied.

"Yes." She accepted the word without a smile. "All the women in the army have tried to marry him themselves or to some of their friends—but, as I say, he's a most gentlemanly—"

"If you say it again you'll be sorry, Isabel!"

"I shall say it again till I convince you he is up to his ears in love with you, and it will come upon you in a flash, and you'll flash back and it will be a flash-in-the-pan. And it ought not to be!"

"It will end everything between us, if I can't come up to the Post without being badgered about widowers, or men of any description."

"Nothing will end anything between us!" she retorted gayly, "because I've got some humor. You're not blessed with much these days."

"I'm blest if I care for your style of humor, if this is a specimen," I said. "You know you'd bring the whole Post about our ears if we should be overheard."

She seized her advantage in this poor speech in the haste of anger. "I don't wonder *you* think of that after your own experiences, poor dear, but I'm on my own ground. If I'm safe, you're safe."

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“—Not from you, it seems! I thought we had a special testimony to bear against this particularly primitive sort of gossip?”

“I never said the army is not primitive. But the army has humor—if it is n’t stationed too long in one place, in a place like this. I’ve just been East, so I have some left. It tickles me to think how pleased your aunt would be—”

“Why do you make me *hang* my aunt!—by dragging her into all my affairs, even the ones you invent for me? If you keep on, Isabel, I shall say, as Beatrix Esmond said to her mother, — ‘Something hath broke between us.’ ”

“Nothing will ever break between us, you goose!—by the way, when you *do* go back to New York, you’ll notice one thing: you’ll hold yourself better. You’re beginning to stoop a little, Edith. But the moment your feet touch the pavement you’ll feel braced; set up!—I always do. My waist goes in and my chest goes out and my head goes up—”

She proceeded to show me how she looked in New York, “set up,” and how I looked in Boisé City, Idaho, when I had slumped and lost my sense of humor and my pride of port. The exhibition provoked immoderate mirth and ended in a swirl of skirts as we chased each other down the narrow hall and nearly bumped into the colonel, coming out from his study buckling on his sword—not to beat us with, but as the instinct of an officer recovering *his* pride of port, after relaxing on a hot afternoon. Isabel’s sense of humor occasionally descended into romps, or what

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might be called so in a lady of her position and perhaps her age—which I cannot answer for. She romped in her conversation, too, at times, and I was not far behind her: but it left a slightly unpleasant taste in one's mouth for which one was inclined to hold her responsible.

The colonel did not hold us responsible: he smiled on us indulgently. The colonel was not young, but then he would never be old. Isabel looked after him a moment as he closed his door. Suddenly she took me by the shoulders:—

“Let me tell you a secret! *My* husband was a widower—not twelve years—two! Don't blush. I'll tell you the rest some day.” She made mournful eyes at me.

I said if I blushed for anybody it would not be the colonel—he undoubtedly could not help himself.

“You need n't blush for me, then! I saved him from a far worse fate. Did n't I say the army is primitive!”

XX

THE gray-stemmed poplars that were bare when I first saw their columns closing down the streets of the valley town, were turning gold, and flocks of leaves were slanting across the shadows on our ditch-path. It was cool enough to assemble the little dancers as early as three, and that afternoon Miss Phœbe Maclay was At Home. It was more than a dancing-class, it was a Birthday. Phœbe was not only in her sixth year — she was six, and hereafter would be in her seventh year. This had been explained ; also I warned her that her father in Silver City might not have been advised of the important fact and she would do well not to count upon his presence. Such things should not be, but they were ! It was sad even to see how easily she accepted the disappointment.

We had come to the last dance before supper, the climax of the lesson. I saw Isabel smile and nod, as her fingers played on, to some one out of the window at her right. As the dance swayed down the room I passed the window and looked out. My eyes met those of Phœbe's father gazing in as if he might have been standing there some time. We did not speak ; we did not even smile ; Phœbe had not seen him. The music stopped and Isabel turned on her stool and he swung himself inside and sat on the window-sill and opened his arms to Phœbe. She flew into them and

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he raised her to his knees. She clung to him close and clasped him round the neck.

"You've come to my birthday! Aunt Edith said you might not know it *was* my birthday."

"Is it your birthday?" he asked, and I saw the pang shoot across his face. Phœbe was not the kind of child who demands, "What have you brought me?" She had a remarkable delicacy about gifts and her scale of values might have been that of the angels, so disassociated it was from price. But he had not even a flower. I knew what he was thinking — his child's first birthday since she became motherless; strangers were there to celebrate it, and he, the greatest stranger, had come not even knowing it was the day!

At supper there were little gifts at each place, and a chaplet of pale yellow poplar leaves to crown each guest. They were so Greek in their bare brown limbs and slender grace of proportions, and the pearly shadows beneath uplifted chins as shining heads were raised —! Phœbe's father placed the wreath on her head and she smiled up at him divinely and he stooped and kissed her. It was his only gift. He retired to one side and Isabel Forth made talk with him while Noreen and I waited on table. We had had all the pleasure — I had had — preparing for the beautiful sight; he had only the enduring pain of absence, worse perhaps than loss. He was silent and his eyes hardly moved from his own child, though all were lovely! Two little crop-headed boys in middy suits and two little girls in corresponding white of

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a filmier texture and ribbons blue and pink. All of them as brown as only the sea and the sun of the plains can do the trick, and all little Americans of the super-representative class.

Everything was easy while the party lasted, but when our guests were gone and we had seen them off at the gate, a stiffness fell upon the unhappy grown-ups in their individual maladjustments. Phœbe, mounted on her father's shoulder, had taken off her wilted crown and mashed it down on his head crookedly over one eye, and he squinted up at her decorated in this bacchanalian fashion. In the same guise he bore her off to bed. I found them waiting at the top of the stairs.

"Would n't you like to put her to bed yourself?" I asked. "She's very clever about undoing things. Noreen will come up and straighten the room after you." I smiled, inferring romps.

"Oh, do, papa! oh, do put me to bed!" Phœbe jumped up and down in his arms and squeezed him around the neck.

"I might n't live to go through with it if I'm to be choked like this. I'd fall on the floor and Noreen would have to pick me up."

"Oh, do fall on the floor!" Phœbe was only too pleased at the prospect.

"Perhaps you'd be good enough to wait awhile till we see what's going to happen?" I supposed I was the person addressed, as there was no one else present, but he did not use my name.

I sat outside on the stairs and heard Phœbe's ex-

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cited laughter and her chatter like a whole nest full of young birds settling for the night.

"Now bring me Dick," she commanded, being at last in bed.

"Dick? what 'Dick'?"

"Why, Dick!—on Aunt Edith's bureau. Don't you see, papa? He's got a bandage on."

The Hermes still wore a bandage, though the doll's petticoat was at present "in the wash," and the bandage ought to have been, I regret to say. Any eye could have seen the likeness to the real Dick "of ours."

"Now give him to me, papa. Not on that side—that's his hurted side. Lay him the other way." A good-night kiss followed, a very fervent smack from Phoebe. "Now kiss Dick too,—kiss Dick, papa!"

He came out looking slightly heated. It was a warm room at bedtime even in September; one of Dr. Davenport's reasons, by the way, for sending us out upon the land.

"I want to say 'good-night' to Aunt Edith," Phoebe called cheerfully. I went, knowing what would follow:—"Now kiss Dick, Aunt Edith."

It did seem possible, as Isabel had declared, that I had parted with my sense of humor and needed to go East. The fly-mindedness of the place affected one's own mind evidently, if one did not take care.

"Will you give me a little time for a talk, somewhere?" he asked at the foot of the stairs. "Suppose we go outside."

Words as serious as these, from him, sent the blood

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to my heart. I suppose I may have turned pale. He turned savage.

“Are you still afraid of the brute?”

“I’m not afraid of you.”

“You are!—you are trembling this minute. Because you don’t trust me, and you never will trust me again. Well; I shall soon be saved the necessity of forcing myself upon you, even on birthdays.”

I was silent, grieved at his anger, for mine had died. His must have been welded fast to his thoughts of me forever, by my own hideous words. Only some fire hotter than the wrath that had fused them could ever melt them apart. So we must go on senselessly; for all was dead and cold between us now. We went to the usual place, and mechanically, side by side, began walking up and down.

“Have you had a letter from Mrs. Aylesford lately?” he inquired.

I had had one not long before, I told him, from the sanatorium; but she had spoken of going home—almost at once, she had said. The letter sounded as if she were quite ready to go—better, better altogether, than I had ever expected her to be.

“Yes; that is it—better altogether. She has proposed to take the children if it would suit me to have her. You, of course, she hopes to have with Phœbe; and the baby’s nurse under your commands. She has everything planned. But she is careful not to urge it. She knows it is a good thing for a man to see his children—The question for these children is, what will be best for them? It would be a great relief to

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you to go back in this way which is so good for them and so happy for her — Mrs. Aylesford. And she robs me of nothing I had not lost, you know. But you will still take care of Phœbe?"

"As long as Phœbe needs me and you will let me," I cried.

"I let you! How strange it is that you can't even understand that! that for the sake of Phœbe I would — and I do — and I have — sacrificed more than I care to think about."

"We will not raise that question after this, then," I said. "I wish to go straight on with Phœbe; I have loved her from the time she was a little mysterious baby looking at you with those eyes!"

He drew one of his great breaths.

"And you will write to me? I'm afraid I can't let you off from that. And I will write — to Phœbe. I must keep in touch with her to that extent."

It was n't really safe for us to be together in the unhappy distortion of our minds. Or his mind; my own I thought was safe from bitterness, but I was hurt and heartsick at his words. Would I write to him about his child? would I endure that he should write to her? His resentment had destroyed his common sense.

"If you find it strange that I can't understand you, it may seem strange to me that you can't give *me* credit for being even human."

"You are human, to children."

"Very well; children are the issue between us."

"Exactly," said he, "if you wish it so."

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"If I wish it so! I should say all other issues that might have been, and should have been, are dead between us."

"As dead as the Doldrums! . . . I shall telegraph Mrs. Aylesford that her 'terms are accepted.' And you will be glad to go as soon as possible, of course. Your friends at the Post will miss you."

I hoped so, I said. "Mrs. Forth is rather a human sort of person: strange that she and I should get on together."

"Oh, women!" he retorted. "You are a close corporation; you have a code of your own."

"As for going back," I resumed, "I love Mrs. Aylesford too. I can't imagine a sweeter place to be. But I do — if you will let me say so? — appreciate what you are doing for your children. Setting yourself aside as if you had no rights in them." Thus awkwardly I put it because it was become so difficult to approach him.

"I am well aware of my rights," he answered coldly. "Some day I may claim them. This is for the present. We may hit upon some compromise later; not so good for them, perhaps, but a little more 'human' for their father. Mrs. Aylesford will write you all the details — about your rooms and the fires and the bathroom they are going to build. I should n't wonder if it may prolong her life, having the children, — now that she has returned to life. She is a very single-minded person."

"But not small-minded."

"No; her letter to me was very far from that!"

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He hesitated — “I don’t believe much in showing letters.”

For some reason he desired, I could see, to show me this letter. I did not wish to read it.

“I agree with you,” I said. “She will probably write to me soon.”

“She spoke of writing to you as soon as she had heard from me. She has a great fear of your going back to your family, giving the children up?” Perhaps that was his reason for wishing me to read her letter, just as she had revealed her heart to him.

I turned to go in. He stood in front of me obliging me to stop. “Edith,” he said, — and then he paused and finished (but I did not believe it was what he had begun to say), — “did you see Mars last night — how close he was to the moon? It may not be an occultation, but it will come pretty near it to-night. Would you care to sit up and watch it — about twelve?”

“No,” I said shortly ; “I’ve seen occultations before. They don’t interest me much.”

It was rude to leave him so, and besides my last words were not safe to leave him with. They had a double meaning which is not a wise thing to indulge in at another’s expense, unless it is pretty well covered. He had been a sort of star, a red planet of the night, — our lonely nights on the mesa, — watched for after sunset, burning bright against the growing dusk. The main point just now was, not that he had been a star, but that he had gone out. So I went back and changed the key : —

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"Is n't the boy to have a name one of these days? Will you write to Mrs. Aylesford about it? — any choice that you have made, if you have chosen?"

He paused, looking at the end of his cigar in a man's attitude of gaining time and self-command. "The boy was named—for me—before he was born. It is not a name I like, but we will not change it. Except — please put 'William' before it."

I seemed doomed to stab him. "Before he was born!" There is nothing so simple as losing a wife, nothing more common than naming a child. But where do the infinite chords of attachment lie, and how can one approach these simple facts of life without striking one of those thrilling strings that are fastened to a human heart!

I was altogether melted and relentant. "For all that I keep saying to wound you, and for all that I have said, and may say hereafter, will you forgive me, Douglas, for the sake of her I know you loved — whom I believe you love this moment still?"

"Have you discovered that? Then there is hope you may learn something else if we both live long enough," was his answer.

"Tell me, now!" I demanded. "I have made you suffer — it would be a sign of your forgiveness!"

He shook his head. "We are done with words. No more words!"

PART V

THE TWO ESSIES

XXI

THE week of the equinoctial, that autumn, I spent in New York, having delivered my two charges safe from their journey to the grandparents, and seen them settled at Lime Point. There had been many a beaming "Well, well!" from Mr. Aylesford, and much wiping of spectacles by grandmamma herself. She really was herself, though she no more trotted through the halls with a guest's wraps and satchels; nor were the halls cold as they used to be. Heaters had been put in and registers—all sorts of dreadful things they had done to the dear old house for the sake of the little hostages of the new generation that must have things different from the old. In all ways Mrs. Aylesford had lost her initiative and was subdued; she did less with her hands and feet, she noticed less what others did. She had never, after twenty years, quite trusted even Mary Martin in certain departments,—for instance, guest-towels, as I remembered. She did not examine my towels now, nor chase after me with wraps on cool mornings.

She was like an old-fashioned instrument of taut wires, unscrewed. The music was hushed; there were none of those quick shivers of response when the invisible breaths of life passed over her; she was lax, but she was not going to snap. She spoke in the same gentle platitudes, but with less energy of delivery. Things, even as late as this and so soon after

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the shock of her grief, had taken new proportions. She had no less sweetness, but more repose.

Perhaps the thing that touched one most was her timidity about the children; she seemed almost afraid to touch the baby. As to advice, she was silent. I am sure she would not have argued with Nanny now. She made no protest, of course, against my visit, leaving the baby to his nurse so soon — she knew I must see my sister, and that many serious matters since papa's death remained to discuss and settle. But I could see the shades of apprehension close over her. I need not say that I left her with reluctance, not only on account of her visible dread of my absence: I feared, somehow, for her — as if she might take flight.

In New York I was given a wonderful, a surprising welcome by everybody belonging to us and everybody I knew. One had to go to Idaho it seemed to learn one's value in New York. Absence, in the case of relatives, may possibly draw one closer to those we have had so near us that any day we might have seen them and done things for them; hence we never did see them and never did anything till they were gone and it was too late. This was Essie's suggestion, who always managed to let in a ray of irony upon my hasty self-gratulations.

"My dear, they are so relieved to have you safe back again, so they need n't reproach themselves — and to know you are so nicely settled up there with the Aylesfords. What is one week! People will do anything for you if it only lasts a week."

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As Essie sat there making this Chesterfieldian speech with an engaging smile, I thought her the prettiest woman certainly that I had seen since I saw her last. I did not mind her cynicism — not relatives, or anything else in New York, could hurt me now. I had gone through that which leaves one immune from such things as petty slights and fancied neglect or patronage. Essie was a comfort in that she was mine, my own sister, just herself, talking in her old way. As to Aunt Essie, I was very soon able to prove how mistaken she had been there.

Aunt Essie had been at the train to meet me with Essie in her carriage. This was my first surprise, but explainable (according to Essie) if it meant I was welcome if I did not stay too long. She took me at once to certain shops, for she would n't have me seen a moment out of mourning. The next surprise — even to Essie, I think — came when she asked me to stay with her, Essie's house being full — as I knew it was, but that had been settled between Essie and me. I glanced at her, and she smiled on the proposition.

"Of course you girls must see each other—we shall manage about that. Come, Essie: you'll give her up, won't you — just for bed and board?"

I knew that Jack and Essie were not in favor with our clever aunt in the smart world. Their ways did not please her, and their independence of her criticism offended her and hurt her affection. And none of us on papa's side had seen much of her since the silly "breach," because of that or other things inher-

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ent both in papa and herself, and in us very likely. My having done this startling thing — as she must have thought it — seemed to have made all the difference, or was it papa's death? I chose the gentler reason, for I knew they must have loved each other well and missed each other during their absurd estrangement. Essie and I thanked her and agreed to consider the invitation, after we had had one night together under the same roof.

In the course of that evening's prolonged talk, till after midnight, I learned why Essie was mollified toward our aunt, though to a degree only.

"Mind you," she said, "I don't believe she would ever have thought of it herself or asked about debts and such things, though she must have known we had nothing; but she heard through Uncle Charles at his club that a plan was on foot among papa's artist friends to take all that off our shoulders. *They* knew, of course, how we were left. That hurt her dreadfully! strangers — beggarly artists and literary men — helping out her own blood. She swept in then magnificently and took it all out of their hands and Uncle Charles wrote a check — I don't know how much it was and I don't want to know. It's done, and that much, however it was done, we have to thank her for. She has never mentioned it. But it began with those old *dears* with nothing of their own to spare, but such memories of papa — such a friend, such a host as he was! Well: he'll be missed — and the studio will be missed. . . . It's perfectly horrible to see it now! — babies and dirt

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all over the place. You won't mind its being sold, will you?"

"I shall mind nothing," I said. "But I'm going to see what's under this invitation. I want to stay there. You won't care if I do?"

"Certainly not. It's quite the thing you ought to do, and Jack and I are not too proud to go there to dinner if she wants us. Something very interesting might come of it; something interesting to you is sure to come of it. She sees you now as a stranger. She's very much bowled over — she can't keep her eyes off you. It's the funniest thing I ever beheld, you two in the carriage side by side — you noticed she ignored that I was the elder. — As I sat opposite, I could see her trying to see your profile, peeping at you, listening to every word, taking you in in an amazed sort of way. We are a wonderful family!

"But you *are* changed, Edith!" Essie regarded me calmly, but with keen eyes. "I'm impressed with you too. Is there anything out there that ages people! — inside, somehow? You look not much different, now I'm used to you — you're browner, like the sea. I should say you were just off ship-board, a long voyage — on deck most of the time."

"I've been on deck — and it was something of a voyage," I agreed. "Yes; I think the West is aging. The men you know are dry, cool, indurated somehow — but they are children. I'm no child!"

"No; you're not. I can see that! Aunt Essie will be a child in your hands, my dear. Use her nicely,

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won't you? She'd be dreadfully convenient if she liked one."

"You need n't say that sort of thing to me! As if I did n't know how 'nicely' you've treated her for convenience' sake."

"I was mistaken. I'm wiser now. I wish we could be friends—with all the family we have left. New York is lonesome—without papa."

We shed our first tears quietly together over this. New York was lonesome to me—stripped of a certain glamour, and of a certain anguish it used to hold for me that would never come again. I was stripped—bare to the bone. It startled me how little I cared now for things I had thought I depended on. It is being aged very suddenly when one cares for so few things.

In Aunt Essie's great beautiful house the thing I enjoyed most was the silence of a well-bred mechanism that left one's thoughts free for immaterial things. An achieved silence, not like nature's fallow pauses, or transitions, yet a thing to rest on too. I would find myself at dusk standing between the curtains of a window on the street, looking at the lights shine reflected in long, quivering lines on wet pavement (it rained nearly every day whilst I was there) and watching the stream of carriages that took men home to their dinners or men without homes to their clubs, or guests going out to dine. That was the sort of pang I might have felt only a year ago—of a girl with no dinner invitations and no new gowns to wear if she had them, no personal hold on one of the throng of exciting folk that

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passed and passed! They did not excite me now. Not one of them could do a stranger thing than I had known, nor demand in me a more difficult, desperate counterpoise. Nothing in humanity could involve me deeper than that soul's adventure in one of the loneliest spots on earth. Fashion could not awe me, nor society nor the world cast down — I had been where men and women suffer mental shame and say to one another naked things.

Gowns indeed! In all my life of "dressing up" to be looked at by critical eyes, I had taken no joy in anything I ever wore, as in those machine-made dresses bought in Boisé City which I put on with the pride of a soldier in his first uniform. This is not pose, it is literal truth. I loved those white dresses on the mesa that were the sign of my acceptance for a service which to me was a consecration. I had tried my hand before at this and that: my time had never been my own. Everybody had a right to it — and a perfectly good right — but system, straight responsibility, definite, consistent orders, had never been mine. I could not forget the one experience of my life when a fearful trust was given me to hold alone, not blindly, — that would have meant despair, — but under orders that I trusted and knew I could obey.

One evening after the tea-hour, as we sat alone waiting for carriage-wheels to announce Uncle Charles — his quiet entrance and his kind hand-shake (I never saw him earlier in the day); seated so, on opposite sides of the fire, Aunt Essie said to me: —

"How satisfying this is! I'm so tired of petting

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up myself—I wish I had some one else to pet. Charles, of course, is a great baby too, but he has people to do everything he wants—Fancy my trying to meddle with him! But you, my dear—I could do heaps of things for you. I could dress you for one thing. You are so lovely the instant you get the right thing on. You do so respond to clothes!”

She smiled at my amusement, but it seemed she wanted an answer. “Now, are n’t you going to stay with me—now you see how we get on together? You have so much of your father in you, and, thank Heaven, of your mother too! You have his imperious look and her gentle way. The last I believe you must have acquired somehow: I remembered you as a rather haughty young person; you were a trifle saucy to an old aunt sometimes, my dear! Do I malign you?”

“I should think not,” I laughed. “But sauciness gets taken out of one; I could n’t have been much like papa if I were not to see a light now and then borrowed from wiser sources.”

“Ah, he never was wise—he never borrowed any more wisdom than he could possibly help. But he was always the most charming, everywhere. I begin to see that in you too; you grow upon one quite dangerously. I’m getting much too fond of you—unless you are going to stay with me, always? I should not be so dull if I had you to look at and to listen to.”

“But my children, dear Aunt Essie! I have two children on my hands.”

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"That is an engagement you can break, can you not, now that your own life is so changed?"

"My life is not so much changed — and the engagement is with one who is not here now to release me."

"You mean your girl friend who died? But, my dear, that is fantastic. Her children have a father, have n't they? Is he quite without means of caring for them?"

"Not without material means. Otherwise there is only the grandmother, who is old and very frail; a breath would blow her away."

"Still, I think you are quixotic. I distrust any relation which is not counted natural by ordinary standards. It's unnatural for a young woman like you to give her best years to the children of another woman, even a dear friend."

"It may be unnatural in some cases. In my own case it comes very direct; I find it quite simple, and I love the call. I love the children — the little girl especially. I am unable to think of my life going on apart from her now."

"But how extraordinary!" said Aunt Essie. "You talk like one who is dreaming. It is not real life."

"I am sorry if I cannot make you see it is life to me. As for dreaming — do you despise dreams?"

"I lost the power years ago to have any. Except, now, this dream of having you. Don't refuse me, Edith!"

"It hurts to refuse you — believe me it hurts! But it would be worse to break this contract which I de-

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liberately entered into. It would bring injurious reactions. If I had made a compact with you first, that could not have been broken either."

"Ah, don't say 'had' — am I too old for a young woman to love me—for a brother's child to be partly mine? I shall not press myself upon you—only in externals where I could set you free. I *like* your not caring how you dress; I know how you must have been teased about your looks, living all your days with those silly artists — You should forget your looks with me: I'd attend to them! You are a thinker—I feel in you a certain greatness, child. You were meant for a great part in life. I want to take you into the world and show you people who don't explode with the first idea that comes into their heads. I want to show you to them! I should be proud in my old age to show you:—'This is America; this is what we can do over there where you think we are so cheap!' You have seen Europe with your father—very delightful, no doubt, but utterly deplorable socially, for you. I could take you into a society that was his before he threw it all away for a palette to stick on his thumb. Don't I know the talk you have been immersed in?—technique, babble of the workshop— You belong in circles where the talk is deep, and simple, and strange to an outsider—where there is a reticence and a grace of the times that do not come again; where elegance is understood, and manners have become a manner as old and mysterious as the past that made it. Your youth has been wasted up to now—and for that I hold myself in part re-

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sponsible. But it is not too late. Having been wasted, will you go now and throw yourself away?"

"I am not thrown away. I am found and used," said I,—"to a purpose more real to me than the life you show me. You make it very wonderful, but it takes no hold— This that I do is an inevitable, a fated trust. I touched it timidly at first fearing all sorts of things, then I took it in my hands—always fearful—then it took hold of me, and I belong to it now. It is a safe and a blessed future, as I see it. All I need is just what you say that you need—some one to pet who is not yourself. In my case of course there is the danger—it may not last."

Here a message interrupted to say that Uncle Charles had been detained downtown—would not dine with us that evening. . . . "What does that mean—'it may not last'?" Aunt Essie resumed when the door had closed.

"The child is her father's and he may marry again. And his second wife will replace me with his children."

"Good Heavens!" cried Aunt Essie; "and you dare to take those children seriously—like this? And what is the man himself, for mercy's sake!"

"He is like other men," I said. "He will probably marry. So I have no time to lose. I must not waste a month, a day—doing what I hope to do for this child—though it's done mostly in the way she is made. I shall try to keep hands off her that are clumsy or not clean."

"What *is* this child—you mean the little girl, I suppose?"

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"Oh, she's a type—as pure as any of your exclusive circles can show, and she is 'America' too. I find refreshment in the study of her mind, as deep and strange as any I can imagine in the society you speak of, and I am proud to be given the trust of guiding it. It is not simple, and I cannot see either why it is quixotic. I think, sometimes:—suppose I had married and died and left a child!"

"You make me shudder!" cried Aunt Essie. "I'm afraid for you. There is in every one of us Bonhams a streak of wild exaggeration that borders on insanity—the passion of one-ideaed folk wherever you find them. We are not responsible. Your father had it—fancy his throwing away his life as he did! *I* had it—you can never know about that, though. I embraced an idea, the wrong one, of course,—and, well; I threw away what I had not the courage to think I could meet as it deserved. It was madness—and cowardice. I see you at least are not a coward, but you are a gambler of the wildest sort. You stake these years of your life,—the last years of your youth, my dear!—on the children of a dead woman and a living man—who may take them from you any day. I pray it may be soon—and then we shall see!"

"If it should be too soon he shall not have them. I will not give them up to a woman who would marry him too soon!"

"Ah, bless you, they do anything! The nicest creatures you can imagine will marry a man before his 'shoes are old'—that's the world, my dear. You dream and forget about human nature, but it does

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not change, cultivate it all you may. My own husband is indifferent fond of me, but if I were to let go—drop out of the procession—he would travel on with another, just as soon as he found one he liked well enough to take instead of his chance of a better one. And what is it to me! I merely thank Heaven we are not men ourselves.”

Aunt Essie, I think, made a great mistake classing her husband with men in general; no wife can afford to do that. It was one of her many mistakes that usually did not meet their punishment as this had, one could see, in her loss of any real influence with Uncle Charles. She might have made him a brighter, bigger man, but hardly a kinder one. She had paid him the supreme compliment of marrying him—she might at least have tried to understand him. In the one week I stayed with them he seemed to me much more than a check-book, — a major-domo, an efficient eye to her equipages and traveling arrangements, an amiable presence at her table. She made him her foil in conversation and sometimes her butt. It was quite terrifying to watch the light play of her words pinning him to his background of silence. She never actually drew blood, but as a spectacle it was no pleasure to her guests—I thought his by far the better part; passive, patient, serene—abiding her words in silence, but not a negligible silence.

But Aunt Essie was too restless to understand herself or other people very deeply. Hers seemed to me an empty life made of everything the world gives and takes away. The shadow of a life, or rather a life

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all light, revealment without revelation, without the softening mystery of nature's shadows, and the definitions of things as they are.

"What did you think of that woman I sent to you with a message in Idaho? I hoped it might remind you that you had a few relatives left in the East. Was she as much of a fool as she appeared to be? Of course no wise person would have listened to me with the least intention of doing what I asked!"

"She did do what you asked — and had no right to ask. She is not a woman easily intimidated."

"No right to ask! Who had a better right, I should like to know?"

"Some one who had taken the pains to know me, and to remember that I am a woman of —"

"Don't repeat to me your age, child. Think what it does to my own! We are heart to heart, and I hope you have a memory that can be trusted to do some wise editing."

"I hope so; besides, we are going to have time to live things down. I was far from resenting your message — I was flattered, but it did amuse me."

"Well; did it inconvenience you any?"

"That would be a long story," I said. "But please don't set Mrs. Forth down for anything like what you said in your haste —"

"Granted, granted! It does n't matter — *she* does n't matter. I thought her a trifle spoiled as garrison ladies must be, when they are pretty — She told me interesting things about the West. Come, we must dress — I hope I have n't taken away your appetite."

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Aunt Essie was silent during dinner and rather cold, but I knew she could not have taken offense at any words of mine, nor was likely to be preoccupied by anything she herself had said. In her life she must have been too often unguarded, with the right persons, to waste time on afterthoughts. I only feared she might have been more deeply hurt by my rejection of her plans for me than it seemed possible to imagine; for they must have been so lately born, vividly as she had presented them.

XXII

MORE people were coming home every day from the country and from abroad, many of them old acquaintances or friends of papa's. Aunt Essie asked whom, mentioning names, I would like to see; I thought she seemed relieved when I begged to see as few as possible, as if the prospect of entertaining in my behalf had bored her. Essie was at the house almost every day, and at luncheon there was nearly always a guest or two added casually to our number. I enjoyed the well-bred faces and well-bred talk — Aunt Essie's talk the cleverest and Essie's face the prettiest, as it seemed to me. But in each person present there was a something subtly satisfying, distinctive in her own particular way. So, after making an excuse of our mourning to see no one, when it came to really seeing those whom Aunt Essie selected to ask, I enjoyed meeting them immensely.

One day, she said abruptly, after the last guest had departed, "Essie, my dear, I wish you would go too — you will have Edith all to yourself to-morrow; this is my last day and I've saved up something to say to her by ourselves. So be off with you like a dear!"

Essie's eyes narrowed a trifle: she never enjoyed liberties nor being bounced like this, but she showed no annoyance. Later she retaliated by commenting

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on the speech with the remark that it was odd Aunt Essie, after all the good company she was supposed to have seen, should not have better manners.

It was nothing new Aunt Essie had saved up. She merely wished to sound my resolution once more as to renouncing the world, as she chose to call it, and burying myself in the flower of my days. But her world, I said, was not for me. I preferred my "gamble." And for that matter, the existence of any natural mother was a gamble for the life of her child, from the hour of its birth. Character was the next risk that parents had to take; marriage, for a girl, grown to womanhood, was the greatest gamble of all. But what we win goes on and on, and what we lose — well, there still was time, some good years yet for the game of playing mother to Phœbe.

"And what are you going to do with all that time, up there in a farmhouse on the Hudson? You can't spend it all on a child unless you smother her to death. What are you going to do to keep yourself alive?"

"I have a plan," I said. "Perhaps it is too soon to speak of it, but you, of course, are the first one to whom I should speak, and you can help me, Aunt Essie. I need your help."

I thought that I might surprise her, but I had not expected to give her such a shock as evidently I had, by the news that papa's friends, some of the cleverest who were writers and men of note, had broached a scheme for collecting his letters and, with the consent of his children, arranging them in biographical form

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which in a sense would be autobiographical. He would tell his life-story in the spontaneous form of letters to intimate friends, and his personality (which was the greatest thing about him) would be manifest also in the responses these letters evoked from those who had known him closely. Such a book would, they thought, have exceptional value because of his large acquaintance with persons of distinction and his residence in many places of interest and his inimitable power of illuminating everything his words touched, his views of life and people and art and nature, everywhere.

Aunt Essie threw up her ringed hands in despair. "Merciful Heavens, this is what comes of knowing those awful lits! I would n't have those crazy friends of his get hold of his private letters for wide worlds. You know what they would do: they would never cut out a phrase that tickled their fancy — not if it broke a living heart — or slurred an old friendship in the grave. Copy, copy, that's all they would care about! Your father was as reckless as I am, my dear, and much crueller — without knowing it. He never was cruel on purpose, but those letters would make him seem so. They would give pain to hundreds whom he really loved. Bless me, I am his sister, but how do I know what the wretch has said about me! You may be sure it was clever enough. I made mirth for him, and he was my despair. So it went in our family when the temperaments began to get in their work. What is love where there are tongues! Never, never! If it's done it will be over my dead body."

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I assured her that it never would be done — not while any one was living of his contemporaries or their children. I had seen to that effectually. For, of course, his children would not consent. Not although they had been asked to assist in the editing — As to the letters, this plan had startled us, Essie and me, into seeing the necessity of collecting them if possible from wherever he had scattered them in all parts of the earth. And here Aunt Essie might help us. Meantime, I begged her to believe that the scheme, so far as his friends could make it so, had been a vast compliment, an immense appreciation, presented with much more delicacy than I had shown in precipitately declining it — in Essie's name and my own. Essie had waited doubtful and half persuaded by Jack, who saw in it fame for papa of a fresh, unexpected kind that would astonish everybody ; he looked forward to wonderful reviews, and perhaps to some money for papa's daughters. I did not blame him. But I crushed the plan at once, Essie consenting and much relieved, I could see, at the stand I took. But even she was astonished when I said that I myself would undertake this work for the sake of papa's memory, though the publication of it none of us would ever see.

“And *you* will read those letters, you scamp ! I see what will become of us all : You'll read us like a novel of Bulwer's time ; you'll satirize us —”

“I shall love you all !” I cried ; “I have read his letters, some of them written with all that gay excess of spirits that you fear so much. When they *are* read

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— fifty or sixty years from now — they'll be a most wonderful picture of New York and London in the days when you were all young, and cleverer than any one living now. And I have read other letters of his that were not written to be clever — written with all the best that was in him."

She looked at me anxiously: "Were those family letters?"

I had to answer, after the jar I had given her; I saw she was deeply stirred, her past torn up before her eyes in ways that to her might seem terrible. "They were his letters to mamma: she left them labeled, 'Your father's letters to me between 1840 and 1859.' We thought it seemed like a message. They were in her old desk found when we carted everything out of the studio. I have only just read them myself."

"You have just read them — in this house?"

I answered: "Yes; in my bed — and slept with them beside my pillow."

"He would have been a perfect lover," she sighed. "Poor fellow! but what a husband!"

I protested. "Oh, Aunt Essie, can't you see? — *that* was why she wanted us to read those letters. She was too proud to accept sympathy even of her daughters for what she knew we must remember of the drudgery of her life. This was her one piece of vainglory, her complete and satisfying boast. So she was loved — as few women have been loved — that covered all the cost."

"At least he never put another in her place, thank

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God!" said Aunt Essie. "I don't know that it was constancy; he had a sense of the fitness of things. He would have hated the anti-climax. Well, well! no wonder, with that message from your poor romantic mother, you would n't listen to me. Your world is the same as hers, eh? 'Love is best!' But where does your lover come in?"

"I am the lover of Phœbe: to love is better than to be loved. That was my mother's message."

"Stuff and nonsense! Her lover could make love in the words of a poet, but he would ask his Phyllis to fetch his slippers. Indeed, I have heard him!"

"Very likely, and what of it? My little love shall fetch my slippers because it is best for her, but when it comes to the fun of life, is n't it all in the things we do for them?—the things you wanted to do for me, dear Aunt Essie,—which I am too old for now, alas!"

"You talk all around and over me, but it comes to the same thing: false economy. Nature protests. You throw away a heart of gold—you refuse to bear more beautiful children into the world and double up on another woman's child who would get on just as well without you. If she's so remarkable, hands can't make nor mar her. No; you are a strange sport for us Bonhams to produce. You must throw back to the Quaker Gurneys. There was never anything like you among us until they came into the game."

XXIII

THAT was my visit in New York, memorable for certain talks, — after the summer of inhuman silences and infernal misunderstandings. These talks enriched the winter that followed with more silences, not inhuman, with a few misunderstandings that did not matter. For the basis was sound and true.

I had ample occupation all day in the children, and in the evenings, the long winter evenings beginning after our six o'clock supper, I had papa's letters to live with; actually a life and a story, or many stories, in themselves; while Mr. Aylesford dozed in his chair, and dear Mrs. Aylesford, tired of knitting, went to the sofa and lay down, with her faint smile of apology up into my face as I spread the afghan over her and shaded her face from the lamplight. She would close her eyes, but I do not think she slept. Then I would take out my bundles of letters. I kept them, the ones under consideration, in two boxes. Those I meant to suppress were in one box; those that needed going over carefully were in a second box; others that seemed perfect just as they were, I carried off as jewels and put in a safer place.

There was no haste about this work. It was scarcely in fact begun, as I had only a small proportion of what must have been the bulk of his correspondence to work upon. Aunt Essie had promised to help me

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collect—but her promises were never very promptly kept. She proclaimed her wisdom in never setting her hand to paper, never trusting the dearest friend she had with anything personal in a letter; but I fear it was not so much wisdom as laziness. It was certainly very inconvenient for her friends when they asked her for direct answers that could not be telegraphed.

My letters afforded a kind of research which I found intensely interesting and very revealing in many directions, and it struck a truer balance in some cases where I had judged rashly or in ignorance. There were stacks of Captain Nashe's letters preserved with the care they richly deserved. What an ardent, a brilliant youth! I believed better of his motives, too, when it came to the story of his Italian campaigns written in haste, without premeditation, with passion and plain sincerity, and with surprisingly little vanity. It seemed when he really had done things he had not boasted. I saw that papa, no doubt, had been as much pained as we young ones were disgusted with his old friend's deterioration. A splendid figure, of the days when his own life had been full of enthusiasm and illusion and hope, come to the very rags and dregs of romance. I should never though be able to understand his wanting the captain for a companion on that last journey, unless it were simple magnetism, the force of a vitally strong, self-willed man acting upon one whose will was slackening, whose trust in his own physical powers had passed into a longing for another's strength to lean on.

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And Aunt Essie! Before the winter was far advanced I had come with consternation upon the cause why her hands went up and she had cried, "Over my dead body!"—It was her living heart I had before my eyes, in certain old letters of her youth which papa had carelessly, inexcusably preserved—or not destroyed. If mamma by any possibility had ever opened his letters, or could have suspected what these were, she would have burned them years ago. . . . Here I read, in her own reckless words to a beloved brother, before his own marriage, when she was his most intimate friend, what had been the "idea" she took,— "the wrong one, of course"; what had been the "madness, the cowardice" of her choice,—refusing to believe she could meet a certain decision as it deserved. She could say, if it were any comfort to her now, "'When I was fair and young a poet sang of me.'" A poet young himself, not yet come into his kingdom, but long since crowned while in his prime as one of the immortals. He had never married, and she had married wealth and Uncle Charles. I cannot believe she had not known the true prince, that she had a natural preference for jigs and the smell of the cooking-fires; but all the same, "Alles ist weg, weg, weg!"

I seemed to see it all, the bland years of childless luxury, her kind and patient consort seated opposite, suspecting, perhaps, but never resenting the contrast forever in her thoughts. This might explain if it did not excuse her secret irritation when the ghost of her youth's madness would rise and rise, and would

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not down. No one but herself was to blame; but I fancied in her a fatal, besetting humility in her youth, which I had seen in papa sometimes when he grew tired of himself and gave in to the cheaper side of him like a willful child trying to be naughty. Those gay, arrogant, worldly Bonhams might often have shrunk from exerting their unexercised ideality and courage (which they no less possessed) in the face of some similar demand.

Aunt Essie never wrote me a word, but she did not forget. She must have stepped into a bookseller's once a week at least and ordered a rare bundle sent up to me in my "farmhouse on the Hudson." I could not overhaul letters in bed, but I could read — when that household of children and tired servants and the aged were at rest. Not all of them asleep — one I suspected of waking, watching long hours uncomplaining in the night. It was useless to ask Mrs. Aylesford if she had slept or if she felt well; she made me the invariable answer which I knew implied it did not matter. She was well, I think she meant, in the sense that all was as well with her now as it ever would be again.

I suppose we knew very little about one another in those separate rooms where the sleepers lay, with walls between that they could have spoken through. I knew nothing, for instance, and never have known anything worth mentioning, about that English-trained nurse of the Billy-boy's who called herself Roberts. It was part of her training that we should n't know nor have to think about her personally so long

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as she performed her duties, which she did much better than any of us could have told her. I saw no more and heard no more of Essie than if I had been in Idaho, except now and then a box of candy from Jack, and a promise at Christmas (with a pretty but very cold dressing-sacque), from Essie, of a visit in the spring. Casually she asked if I were doing anything with papa's letters?

I might as well stop here, with this part of my story, for everything stopped and then went on again on a lower key in a subdued monotone like the wind you do not hear or the mill or the fountain — till it ceases; like the scents we breathe and no longer know that we smell; like the lights and dusks and moon-rises that pass unreckoned when we see them, lost in thought and alone. All by degrees make up an atmosphere of the spirit to which the insistent brain at last submits; as a sleepy child resists to the verge, sleep that creeps over him, and then suddenly yields all at once and is in a deep dream. In that dream we passed our first spring anniversary, Nanny's mother and I. There had been the same wet weather of a year ago, the same freezing and thawing on the dreary roads, the dingy snow-banks up the lane, the confinement to piazzas; but it was so complicated with the question of children's colds and exercise that I spent no sentiment nor shivers of remembrance upon it. Wherefore I knew that my mind was normal, at least so far.

So these days passed and others that ushered in the time of blossoms on the hillsides that we saw

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looking across the river, of our own blossoms that we went up the lane to see, of long days and soft spring nights, and visits from the city. Essie and Jack were our first guests, and they embellished the place almost like the first garden-flowers themselves. It never failed to amaze me how they kept so smart and looked so prosperous on three children and scarcely anything a year. Essie, when I glanced her over, sententiously explained, "Aunt Essie — an Easter-card! a sort of blotter that I flipped over rather scornfully, and between each leaf, if you please, a ten-dollar bill! That was a great stroke, your visit." But this was a side of my sister that I had never enjoyed. This was the mother-hen scratching and clucking to her brood.

I liked better to hear her discourse of her children's characters in her cozy, impartial way; and I listened eagerly to her comments on Phœbe, her "darling" looks and manners that did me credit, she remarked. She saw the real distinction of her little face, already so full of significance to my eyes. Essie's I knew were keener and absolutely without glamour.

Aunt Essie had not missed the chance of Essie's visit to send one of her own messages that she never could bring herself to write. "She really wants you," Essie urged. "She has taken an extraordinary fancy to you. And she seems worried about the letters. What a mare's nest! She says she must have a hand in it herself."

"She can't possibly have a hand in it! There won't be anything done if she does. If we can't be trusted with our own father's letters they had better be

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burned. But she might help us secure them from everybody else — if she'd only do that!"

"She'll do it. She'll do anything if you'll go and live with her and make her. She's just a spoiled child. Why don't you come back into the family? You are n't an Aylesford; you belong to us."

"My dear Essie, you're a mother: you know how a child takes hold of one. What should I do — what should you think I could do — without this child that you can see is the main thought with me day and night. I live in her as you live —"

"You know I don't — live in my children like that! I'm doing a great deal better by them, I think, just living my own life and leaving them alone a good deal of the time. If you don't want to give up these children here, why not go and stay with Aunt Essie now and then — take a month off with her? Why give her up?"

"Take a month off! Have you ever tried teaching a child? It's only a little you can do each day, but you have to keep it up; you cannot lose the thread. I should lose everything — I should lose my senses — if I lived with Aunt Essie the whole of any month, if I had to talk all the time about papa and mamma and her theories of what life is, or ought to be. She's a good deal better than her theories, but she has never discovered the fact herself."

When I go up in the air like this, Essie is calmer than ever. What I say makes no impression on her mind, but she is impressed by the fact that I'm needlessly in earnest about something that is all a mys-

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tery to her; but if it means "Hands off!" that she can understand and act upon perfectly without pique or fuss.

She merely asked, "Were n't you rather happy that week you spent with her?"

"Yes," I said. "That was a very necessary week all around, but all the good it could do has been done. It would spoil it all if she saw too much of me. Aunt Essie can't stand very much of anybody for long. That's why she can't keep a secretary."

"But what about you? Don't you ever expect to visit anywhere? Don't you want anything yourself? These nice old people here are bores compared to Aunt Essie!"

"And the place is a bore, compared to New York. But you see I don't compare them."

"What do you do? What do you think about when you sit here" (we were seated under the willows by the mill on the old talking-stones) "and watch the admirable Roberts with her admirable mending sitting by that baby sound asleep?"

"I don't watch Roberts much; she does n't need it."

"But, Edith, you're getting thin!—you have a cloistered look. Have you renounced the world in any form?"

"Yes," I derided, "in the form of cigarettes."

Essie had noticed that, without comment, though. Now she asked practically: "What have you done with Jack's case?"

"Jack's case!—you mean the Russian silver?—Well, I like that! Is Jack an Indian giver?"

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"No; but I am! — and if it is n't doing you any good —"

"When was it yours, I should like to know? You nearly boxed his ears about it, if I remember."

"That 's only part of the ceremony of gifts with us. I always relent —"

"Especially when he gives the gift to some one else!"

"It was all in the family; but what did you do with it?"

"Paid a debt of gratitude that was personal to myself."

"It must have been to a young man. 'Ladies,' I suppose, don't smoke in Idaho?"

"It was a young man," I said.

"Has *he* got anything to do with what you think about in this place? Who was he, anyhow?"

"No one of the least consequence to you or to me. His name's Dick Grant. You can write to him — I'll give you his address — and say the case I gave him was n't mine to give —"

"Bah, bah!" cried Essie, quite herself. "I got a rise out of you, anyhow. You're not quite gone to heaven if you have taken the veil. . . . I suppose you think about Nanny a good deal, here where you were together? She was a haunting little thing."

"She rather haunts me," I said.

"Nanny was really the fatality of your life," Essie pronounced, with one of her efforts at analysis.

"Oh, no; papa was the fatality of all our lives. He was the most helpless and the most powerful one

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of the family. If he had n't taken a notion that I could paint, for instance, I should never have seen Nanny, nor Idaho."

"Did you really like it out there, honestly?"

"I hated it, and so did Nanny. But it 'haunted' us both. It has tremendous force, concealed somehow; things may happen any time, but you don't know what, nor where to expect them. It's like a sea sown with floating mines, innocent of its own terrors. You may go safe a hundred times and then you may strike something that explodes and you go out of sight."

"Indeed!" said Essie, eyeing me narrowly. "Did anything explode with you out there?"

Essie can root anything out of me, if she really tries; also she is safe as the grave; and she would never by a thousand miles get the measure of this that had happened to me, this explosion.

"If you give one guess, aloud," I said, "I shall go into the house and not be alone with you again till you and Jack go home."

"I should n't have to give more than one," she said. "Not that I should think of mentioning it to you."

"If you ever mention it to a living soul it had better be me!"

"That's all right—I know you trust me, though I don't know why. I could tell you perfectly well what happened, and knowing you I know you must have taken it too hard. But it's better to be a goose than to make your family ashamed of you. I don't mind your taking it too hard!"

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"That's why I trust you. But leave me and my floating mines alone after this, please. Everything's exploded that can explode. I'm in safe waters now."

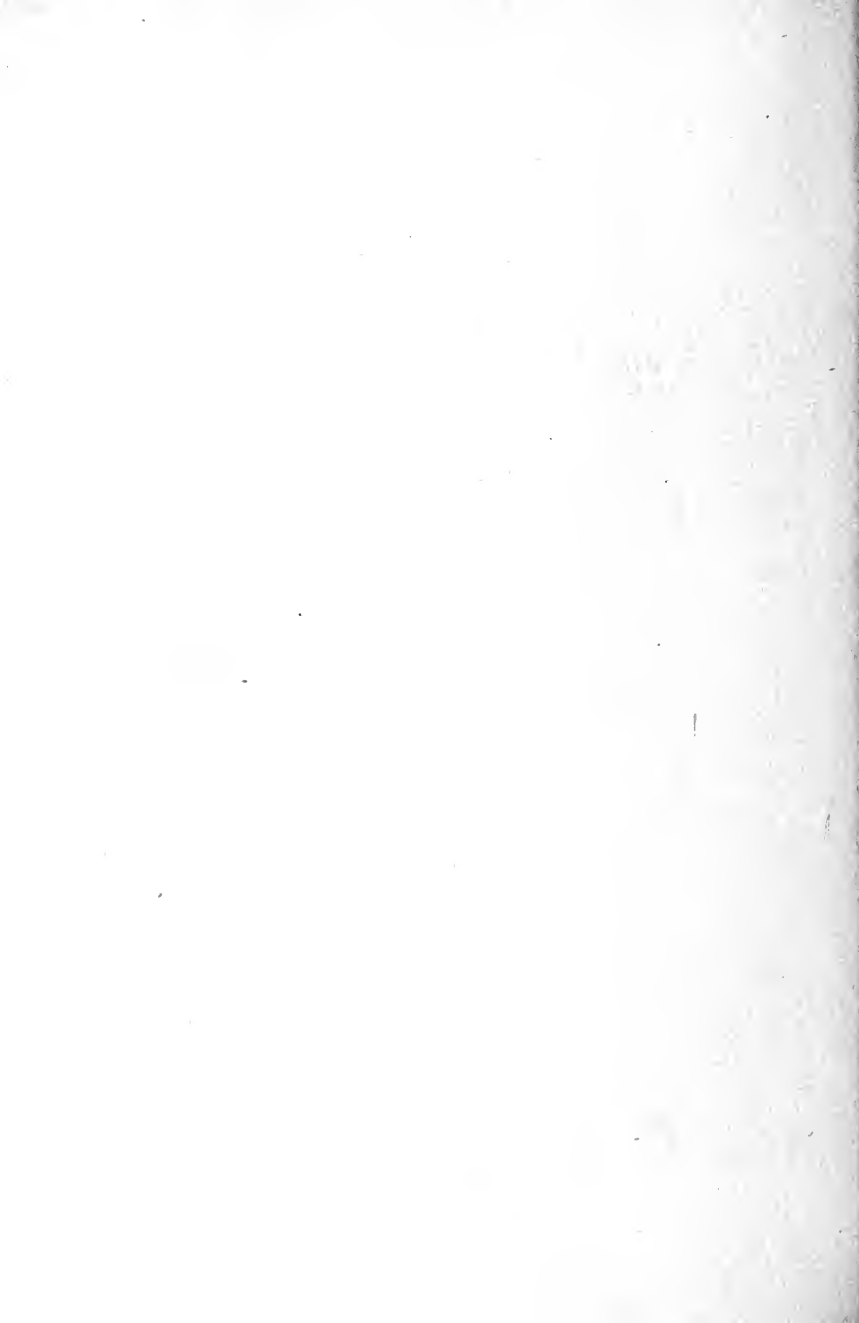
"Safe fiddlesticks! Once a goose always a goose. But a silly goose, not a stupid goose."

"Living with Aunt Essie would not prevent any of my natural silliness from overtaking me. Make that plain to yourself, and make it plain to her if you can. I like her a great deal more than you do — so much, in fact, that I should n't dare to live with her."

"You'll do as you please, of course. — Only, I don't like nuns in the family, cloistered nuns."

PART VI

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XXIV

STRAWBERRIES were ripe, raspberries still clung to their white cones, but were turning pink and promised a fine crop. Mrs. Aylesford took more interest in house matters now that the fruit-canning and preserving season came on. I learned a new or a very old way of doing up strawberries in their own juice under the heat of the sun. They were set out in large crockery bowls covered by a pane of glass and exposed to the hottest rays all day: no insects nor air nor dust could get in. Drops of moisture collected on the underside of the glass, but evaporation was slow, and hour by hour, day after day, the delicious fruit soothed and simmered and grew richer in flavor, a distillation and a conservation, the very poetry of preserving. Phœbe was discovered one day alone in the garden, violating the sanctity of that pane of glass, and popping a warm berry into her mouth in hurried ecstasy. She was deeply chagrined. Her face burned crimson with shame and the heat of the sun where we stood. She eyed me shyly with one sweetened finger at her lips. I could have fallen upon her and kissed her; instead I marched her in to her grandmother to confess what she had done. It wasn't long before she came bouncing out again, by no means covered with disgrace. She slipped one hand in mine. I turned it over and examined it.

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"It is n't sticky," she remarked. "Grandma washed it, and my face. She kissed me. And she laughed and cried—that funny way. She said mamma did that, too, when she was a little girl. Took strawberries. Was mamma naughty?"

"She may have done it once, but she would n't do it again. Or grandmother would n't have laughed."

"I'm not going to do it again," said Phœbe, quite contented with herself. "I said so to grandmother."

It was the next day I saw grandmother with Phœbe, and a spoon, slip off down the garden. I watched them while she lifted the pane of glass herself and Phœbe fished out a spoonful and gazed rapturously at her fond confessor while the celestial morsel found the longest way down. The road of repentance for Phœbe would be a primrose path if grandmamma could make it so.

That summer Mr. Aylesford missed his usual companion, after supper, when he went out to see how everything was getting on. Mrs. Aylesford's strength was not equal to making the rounds of the place with him—she sat wrapped in shawls on the piazza or wandered very slowly up and down; but it gave her pleasure to see us go forth, Mr. Aylesford and I, with Phœbe between us holding a hand of each. I learned to know the vegetables that were only just above ground, never having seen them except in market-baskets or on the stalls. I studied my garden calendar of dates for the flowers coming into bloom and for the wild flowers we searched the fields and woods to find. One afternoon Mrs. Aylesford and I were

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hulling strawberries for supper: she liked to do little sitting-down chores for Mary Martin who was always busy.

What was it, I ventured to ask, — out of this deep sense of peace, — that had brought her back to life, to the willingness to live and care for things again?

“Why, the children!” she answered as a matter of course. “When I heard Phœbe had scarlet fever and nowhere to go but out on the dry land, in that deserted place, why, it went through me like a knife. I was n’t feeling much of anything then, but I felt that! We never quarantined scarlet fever in my time. I don’t think it was called contagious like measles or small-pox. But I knew what it meant to be packed off like that, in that wild place alone with only strangers, afraid to go near you. We know it can’t be helped when people avoid us in sickness, but it does hurt the feelings to be cut off—it’s very lonesome. I’ve been through it. You had to go through all that alone and the work besides — up nights and no one to rest you in the day. And this house doing no good to anybody. Her grandmother — not even knowing the child was dangerously sick! That was n’t your fault. It was because I had crept away and people were taking care of me. I had n’t even offered the house she was born in to Nanny’s motherless children — turned out on the bare land. It shocked me almost to death. Perhaps it shocked me to life.

“I got up next morning and wrote to you, and made them send for father to take me home. He

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used to come to see me at the sanatorium, but what could he do!—it was forlorn to see him; and when he was n't there he was alone with Jonas and Mary. I saw all of a sudden how he was aged—and that was another shock. But it did me good. Coming home did me good, to find things that needed looking after. . . . You see I am getting stronger all the time?"

I did not see it. But I knew the thing now that hurt her and took her strength was silent worry, not connected with death, but with something in life that she could not understand; something that came much nearer to her than I somehow had imagined it would. And I, who loved her so, had been fated to bring it on her! And I could never tell her why.

All that summer and all the fall till house windows were shut and we no longer heard that lessening roar, the great through trains went crashing past our station. I should n't have taken the Chicago Limited, the train that most expressly and haughtily thundered by; but any train would have done that was bound West far enough to meet a vision of great plains ringed with mountains and the smell of dust and sage and the sound of the desert wind. Nuns do fret at their narrow cells, and I can answer for them, the second year must be the worst. It was my second year.

Heretofore in our life there had been always the chance of adventure, with a father whose mind one could never predict except that it would change. All

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hope of change was over for me when I refused Aunt Essie's offer of a home and a share in her adventures — which I had never despised! She had broken up her establishment in New York and gone abroad indefinitely — and of course she never wrote. Tied to two children and two aged folk, my journeys now must be the famous migration from "the blue bed to the brown," and my adventures those of the life within one's self which cannot be revealed.

That winter we knew, by his letters, that Douglas Maclay was in Chicago for a few days. The old people grew excited, awaiting his telegram to say by what train he should arrive. He did not come. His next letter was from on board the Union Pacific westward-bound. It hurt like a blow — my poor old dears! Mrs. Aylesford seemed stunned. They held him in their fond, loyal hearts almost as a son; his two children were under their roof, whom he had not seen in over two years — two years in the fall! What did it mean? To me the sight of their consternation, which they were too proud to speak of, was simply ghastly. I had prepared for myself the spectacle — long drawn out — of a death-in-life withdrawal these simple hearts could never understand. Their daughter's husband, the father of her children, had shaken them off — and the children — like a last year's suit of garments good enough for the poor. They were the poor, but they were proud.

As time went on and the situation did not clear up to a mind so direct in its cognizance of duties and ties of blood as hers, I began to fear the perplexity

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of it would impair in a manner permanent and serious what little strength dear Mrs. Aylesford had left. Easy as her flow of words could be on any simple subject she was not shy of, discussion of conduct in those she loved, or subtleties of her own relations with them, I conceived would be impossible to her. I hardly imagined that she and Mr. Aylesford said more to each other than she said to me. . . .

Another year might have passed before she said anything at all that I can remember, on this wearing subject that was always between us — wearing her out before my eyes. I think it was now four years! — can it be believed? — yet the bitterness, the deadlock was not mine. I must suppose he meant me to feel that I had created it in him. But what could I do?

That day she said to me with effort, but straightforward as she always was: —

“Has Douglas Maclay changed, I wonder? He used to make a great deal of Phœbe. I thought he was a good father. And his letter to me about the children coming here was so kind and affectionate! I have kept it all this time — it is very long ago! It makes me sad to read it. He writes to father now and then on business; he does n’t explain anything why he does n’t come, but he sends messages to me just as if he had n’t acted so strange! I never heard anything like it — I never did! There’s death in families and disagreements, but he does n’t seem put out about anything? Can you think what it could mean, Edith?”

I groaned in my heart as I lied to her — but it was

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not all a lie : "I know him no better than you do, dear Mrs. Aylesford."

"Why, it's dreadful the way the children are going to forget him. Little Billy would n't know him if they met on the road — even Roberts would n't know the father of the child she is taking care of."

"Phœbe will not forget him," I said. "They are great friends in their letters, you know."

"I don't know much about Phœbe's letters, any more. She never shows me any. I don't know if it's an accident or if you think she had better not show them?"

These letters of Douglas to Phœbe had, it is true, become an embarrassment between us, in a manner most natural, if anything could be called natural in his relations to us and to his children. When he first began to write, he tried to stoop his mind and style to hers and I could feel a man's diffidence in the attempt, conscious of a grown person looking over the child's shoulder, as it were. Phœbe at that time could not read "writing" — not her father's writing. He did not do it well, and I pitied him. After a while he seemed to limber up to his work, and the letters began to show some ease and pleasure in the performance. At this time they were treated as family letters. So few things happened to any of us that anything, even a letter, that happened to one was shared as far as possible. But by degrees, Phœbe's father had gained proficiency in a way of writing to us both — to me as well as to Phœbe — accepting the fact that *I was* always looking over her shoulder. It was very

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delicately done, but not so obscurely that no one else could have seen that they were no longer letters to be passed from hand to hand. This is saying more than would seem necessary about anything so simple as the "Dan and Trinket stories," as we called them, which contained the gist of the whole matter. It was about this time, however, that I ceased to remind Phœbe that she had not shown grandmamma papa's last letter. Grandmamma, of course, had craved to see it and had observed the omission. I was accustomed lightly, at table when Mr. Aylesford was present, to retail interesting parts of their contents. Mrs. Aylesford had noticed all this in silence; it must have piqued her and worried her also.

So I took a sudden resolution: whatever the effect of the letters themselves, it could not be worse than this brooding and speculating over the reason why they were withheld. Also I was curious to see if she would see what I had thought that I could see. I brought her the whole packet (saved by Phœbe) beginning with the first of the Dan and Trinket stories. I made no explanation of why they had not been shown except one that was a subterfuge and not sincere.

"You see he has become a story-teller," I prefaced. "I hope he won't feel shy if his audience is enlarged. He is used to me always looking over Phœbe's shoulder," — I repeated this idea, — "I'm hardly more of a grown-up than she when it comes to these stories."

Mrs. Aylesford looked at me in surprise. "A story-teller? I never supposed he had much imagination."

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"That's why I think he might be shy about trying to use what he has: like any one who begins a story made up for a child, when grown-ups come and listen."

"I don't think he would mind me," said Mrs. Aylesford.

Dan and Trinket were the names of his saddle-horses which he used alternately, Dan for long, hard trips, Trinket for riding about the mines. He had developed the habits of each of these animals and his own relations with them into almost a set of fables—to our bursts of applause in Phœbe's words in her answering letters. "More, more, please, about Dan and Trinket, papa!"

These letters I had encouraged Phœbe to save, for they were becoming valuable in themselves: pictures of the high trails and the mountain-pastures up near timber-line in sight of the snow-capped peaks of the Saw Tooth Range. Some of them were quite heart-breaking in the middle, and we had to look ahead and reassure ourselves as to the end before we could go on without tears. But in all the stories of the pastures or the camps or the trails, Trinket was the star-lady and Dan supported her in the leading male rôle. His was more of a character-part; he was not represented as a hero. He was the horse the other man rode when his master went off with a companion and camp-mate on one of his long trips. No one ever rode the star-lady but himself; she was never to be sold, never loaned to any one (this we were repeatedly assured of). She was the kind of creature only one

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person should handle — because she had an organization which whoever rode her needed to study ; as fine as a woman's and more sensitive than most women's. There was nothing like her in the Territory. Not that she was n't a trifle shrewish — she was out of her proper element in a rough mining-camp. The altitude got on her nerves. Dan got on her nerves ; not so much on the trails, where they traveled single file and she did not have to see his ugly old nose poking on ahead of her ; she could n't keep up with his stride on a walk, and his long, slinging trot mile after mile, when they traveled together, nearly broke her heart. She was held in from the smooth run which was her flight in equivalent. None of his gaits — he had n't many — suited hers. She knew herself faster than he, but she was n't allowed to prove it in the work they did together. The roads that were his roads were not meant for her. He annoyed her even when he minded his own business on the trails, but still more when, as occasionally happened, they were driven in harness together. (It was an indignity, but sometimes a necessity.) He would offer to pull more than his share of the load on a long, stiff grade, which is a tactless thing to do to a proud lady traveling beside you. The well-meaning Dan got snapped at, he got pushed out of the road, and they both had to have reminders from the whip — his fault ! Still, Dan had nerves too ; he had affection and memory. He went off his feed if left alone to graze in the pasture where they were commonly turned out together. Instead of munching for a living like a sensible beast,

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he would spend his time running back and forth the length of the fence, watching for his field-mate, and if he beheld her coming led by the halter, he lifted up his voice in loud trumpeting of joy. But sometimes he waited long and actually grew thin. . . . Here, I had to stop, and Phœbe, swallowing hard, said, "I wish Trinket liked Dan a little better. Don't you wish she did, Aunt Edith?"

"These things can't be forced, you know, with animals any more than with people."

"But people can try to be nice to each other—you have told *me* so—if they have to live together. She ought to be polite to Dan when he's doing his best to please her."

"Yes," I agreed; "she ought to be polite to him, instead of being whipped into it, and getting him whipped too."

It was the horseman's rapture, of course, that gave such a thrill to the terms in which Trinket was glorified by the master who wrote of her. She was a thoroughbred; she had pure Arab blood back in her sires in England. She was a foolish fine lady, difficult to handle if she were not understood, but she was a jewel, a darling, in spite of all her nonsense. She had fire and endurance and spirit, and she never shirked her work. She tried a man's patience, but she was a beauty, and she was mightily beloved. She was a creature like some women whom you want to look at all the time. And there were good hours, sometimes whole days, on the long roads, when her mood matched your own, when to travel with her was like

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music and you wished the road might go on forever.

I had hung around more or less, uneasily, while these stories were being read by my dear old friend, intensely curious, I may as well own, as to what she would or would not see in them. For there might not be anything there! All the trepidation on my part about having them read might be founded on pure imagination of a kind not to be proud of.

She read them slowly, and with many a pause. At length she laid the last one down. She sat some time in silence, and then she said:—

“I understand why you did not show these letters. They are not written to Phœbe; they are written to you. If you can’t see his meaning all through them, you must be very blind.” I was silent. “Would you be willing to tell me if you do see it, Edith?”

“If there is any meaning there, he has covered it up, and we must leave it so, I think. He is not a man who cannot say what he means—if he has anything to say.”

“What he means is friendship of a very beautiful kind, and a sad kind, if he has to hide it from you in fables. Have you ever said anything to him to make it hard for him to speak any plainer? Did you part good friends in Idaho?”

“Not exactly,” I said.

“I was afraid of it,” she sighed. “I’ve wondered often if that might not account for some of the things we don’t understand. I know it must have been a difficult time with you both. You would never quar-

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rel, — you are too sensible for that, — but there might easily be a misunderstanding.”

“There was,” I agreed, — “a quite serious misunderstanding. But other things, we decided, were more important than what we thought of one another, — so we let it go. That was not the point between us.”

“It seems to be the point now, with him. There is deep feeling under these little stories. They almost make me cry. Are you going to be silent, Edith? Don’t you ever write anything to him but business?”

“It is not my place to write anything but business. He asked me, when we said good-bye, to write to him about Phœbe, and he would answer — to Phœbe. Now, if he wants to say anything to me, he must do so, and I will answer as I can. It would be absurd, indelicate, to notice these stories to Phœbe as if they were messages to me.”

I had grown quite excited, and I could see my dear Mrs. Aylesford shrink into herself. But presently she found courage to say: —

“If he ever should write, Edith, and offer you friendship as true and unselfish as — as poor Dan’s, could n’t you behave a little better to him than that pettish little Trinket? I could think of you quite differently. There must, indeed, have been a ‘misunderstanding,’ if that’s his idea of you!”

“Mrs. Aylesford!” I cried, “you must not — indeed, you must not confuse me with — I wish, I *wish* you would not think of it at all!”

I got down on the floor in front of her chair and

reached my arms to embrace her waist, her heavy old woman's waist, thin and shrunken as she was in flesh, in face, and hands that caressed me. "Let us leave it as it is. If it ever comes in such a shape that we cannot leave it, then is time enough for talks like this. I don't want anything to happen — anything more!" I cried.

"But we can't prevent things happening — to him!" — and now I saw uncovered the heart of her great fear which was my own. "Have you ever thought what his life out there must be? He is not too old to be thinking of — of another home. I should be a very selfish mother if I wanted to keep him all his life locked up in memories of my own child. He is a living man, not a woman's tomb. Such lives of constancy are beautiful, but they are very rare, and they must be more possible when a man's thoughts are taken up apart from women. But he has one woman always in his mind. He never thinks of Phœbe, but he thinks of you. He writes to you when he writes to her; that is as plain to me as if he said so. I can imagine how difficult it would be to say the first word to you alone, but that word will come. And it ought to come! And, oh, my dear, when it does come — think how safe and sure we should be! Think of a strange woman coming into Phœbe's life — a third mother! And he is to me like a son almost. He was brought into this house almost a corpse — nearly gone, that night of the storm on the river. I watched his face for hours before he came to himself. I liked his face and I trusted him, and father

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trusted him. I think we know him perhaps better than you do, or could — in such a wild, hard summer as you had out there. He speaks of the altitude getting on the nerves of a horse — I can see how everything must have got on your nerves. Be kind to him, dear, be kind ! That is the only wisdom old people have to spare — be kind !”

After this outburst (which left us both in tears) Mrs. Aylesford literally took to her bed. I suppose never in her life before had she dared so greatly in words and in a case so nearly affecting those whom she loved most. It completely prostrated her.

XXV

I WAS not really as anxious about the prostration as about the restlessness that followed, after she got up and began to go about the house as usual. She took her breakfast in bed and dressed slowly as she felt like it; she was quite an elaborate dresser in an old lady's way. After that she did bits of sewing or read, or I read aloud to her if there was time, mornings being my own busy part of the day. At eleven o'clock, Phoebe and I walked to the post-office in the village. I usually went through the form of asking if she had any errands, or letters to mail. Jonas did the errands, and Mrs. Aylesford wrote very few letters. Writing letters she said tired her. Well; during this time of restlessness I speak of, she seemed to be writing letters or something a great deal of the time; but strangely little came of it except tiny torn bits of paper in her waste-basket. So close we lived together, acquainted with each other's smallest habits, even a thing like this could not escape observation.

There was something on her mind which with difficulty and many false starts she was endeavoring to transfer to paper in a manner exactly suited to her idea. There was something on my mind, too, and in the hypnotic connection between our two minds bearing on this one subject the awful notion came to me: suppose I had communicated my own idea to her un-

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consciously, and she with greater courage than I had had was "putting it through." So far, however, I believed she had accomplished little besides failures. No letters of hers had gone out of the house unless she had mailed them privately which was too absurd.

What I had been thinking was something like this: If he would come back and say to me now, soberly and sanely, such words as she expected him to say, such words as she saw coming,—if he should offer marriage on the basis of friendship and our mutual love of Phœbe,—I believed I should have to take him: for Phœbe's sake, for Phœbe's grandmother's sake, for the way it would devastate my own life if I should have to give Phœbe up to a stranger. I must not be the dog-in-the-manger to him: neither eat myself nor let another eat. It was human food; if I could not away with it I might starve, but I need not quarrel with another applicant for my place. It was not a good simile and it broke down, but it came near enough to my meaning. I would have taken him if he had come home then; I should have been afraid not to take him. But his coming was a very different thing from his being encouraged to come by some person in this house. If Mrs. Aylesford, with the courage of her cause, in the most delicate form words can take, had done this thing,—alas for Douglas, alas for me!—in our dead-lock where one must speak first; but if that first word should seem to have come from me, or prompted by me through another, the very thought would destroy me! Yet that was what I feared.

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Phœbe and I were just starting for our walk and I had gone up to ask my perfunctory question, also to tell her grandmother we were starting (we held ourselves responsible to each other for every hour of the day). Mrs. Aylesford always inquired next where Billy was; and I told her that he and nurse Roberts had other fish to fry — Roberts was a rather masculine type of person well adapted to the care of a lively boy. This being disposed of, I asked her about letters or anything for the post-office. Her delicate face seemed smitten, as it would be if she had anything to hide from me and was trying to do so. She answered hurriedly with averted eyes, "No, no; I have no letters to go."

We were nearing the village when Jonas passed us in the light two-seated wagon. He drew up. "Want a ride?" he drawled. "I put in the extry seat thinkin' I'd overtake ye. It's pretty warm walkin'." Phœbe was always ready for a ride, so we climbed in. As we entered the village I told Jonas, if he had other errands, I would take any letters he carried to the post-office, as I was going anyhow.

"I got one," said Jonas. "The old lady give it to me early this mornin'. Called me upstairs to give it to me. Most always it's *Mr.* Aylesford who writes out West; hes anything happened out there?"

Jonas's position in the household warranted a curiosity that was only friendly. The letter he gave me was in Mrs. Aylesford's hand, addressed to Douglas Maclay.

One does n't tamper with the United States mails,

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but I felt quite ready to do so. And I almost wished I had, after reading the letter Phœbe received that day from her father. She opened it as we were jogging along home, and she jumped up and down on the wagon-seat with joy, crying, "Oh, goody, goody, there's another Dan and Trinket story! Isn't that word 'Trinket'?" Phœbe still had difficulty with her father's writing: it was not clearly legible like a business man's — really almost a temperamental hand. The word was "Trinket," and that settled it; we could afford to wait.

It had been long since we had heard of Dan and Trinket. Either the stories had been told to Phœbe alone and their author had begun to think she might be getting too old for them, or, if they had conveyed a subtler message, there had been no response, hence silence! However it was, there had been no more fables for humans in the manners and customs of equines. The last story, we were told, was literally true, and to my mind it was one of the saddest of the series, pointing to a conclusion as needless as it was ironical and bitter.

He had been on a fishing-trip, taking a man along whom he called his "swamper," who made camp and took care of the horses while he was following, upstream, the course of fisherman's luck. The horses had been turned out on a high bluff where the wild pasture was good, but as they were inclined to hang around camp at night the man had thrown a few pine boughs across the narrow defile leading up to the bluff, shutting them back about their business of

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grazing. The bluff in front was high and steep above the river, but by going back to the head of the trail and following it down, animals or creatures that had made the trail came to the water through a side-cañon much lower than the bluff. This the horses had been expected to discover for themselves; but Dan and Trinket had not seemed to even try. They depended on the human help they were used to, when the need came, and could not understand why they were forgotten of man! At night the swamper went up to see if all was right, and found them hanging around the barrier; there they stood, the stupid things! He drove them back with sticks and returned to camp. By the second day they had ceased to eat, having no water. By the third, when it was time to start for home, the thing had nearly become a tragedy—and I was forced to stop reading and comfort Phœbe. Their master, in telling the story, blamed Dan, who was more of a “rustler” than Trinket. No “States horse” like her could be expected to know the ways of the ranges. Dan must have been a bone-head (another of his terms of reproach) to have got himself and her into such a scrape. They were hollow with want of food, gaunt and sick for water, when their state was at last discovered. They would probably have hung around the barrier till they dropped, if the fishing-trip had gone on much longer.

“I hope he scolded the man!” had been Phœbe’s comment at the time, — “I don’t blame Dan a bit. He was n’t a wild horse, he was a human horse.”

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"Half-human," I suggested. "That's so much more difficult than being all-wild or all-tame."

After this true story, that sounded like allegory, we had heard no more of Dan and Trinket; hence to-day's excitement at their reappearance. Eager as Phœbe was to hear what was coming next to our horse friends, I perhaps was almost as bad—as foolish. What did come came like a shock. Trinket, on account of her condition as a result of the altitude, had been sent down to Boisé Barracks where she would be given expert care and a change of feed, and be exercised by the sister of the commandant's wife, Miss Blair, who was a finished horsewoman, who rode like a trooper. That was all! . . . Phœbe looked blank.

"Papa said nobody at all should ever ride Trinket. Who is Miss Blair?"

Who was Miss Blair! How should we know? There might have been long chapters of his life out there and undercurrents we had never suspected. I had not heard of Boisé Barracks for years; Isabel Forth and I did not correspond regularly—only through her could I have heard of army orders and who had succeeded them at the Boisé Post. Unless Douglas had chosen to speak of them, we could not have known of these new friends—it was not conceivable that he would send a horse like Trinket away, with permission for any one to ride her who was not a pretty close friend—whose riding he knew all about—a man does not always mention whom he rides with. The hospitality of the Post in itself

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was unusual, implied considerable intimacy back of it. And I had just mailed to him a letter from my dear, deluded friend, based, I felt certain, on those risky words between us as to these—oh, these terribly misunderstood poor little stories! My face burned, my blood boiled and froze with shame. . . . I, to be thinking of him waiting at the barrier, dry, wasted, lacking the sweet springs of life because of a little misunderstanding about finding the way! He was a good “rustler” after all—he had found the way—back and down by the accustomed trail. It was only I who stood alone dumb with puzzled waiting, land-locked, inland far— Here I saw that Phœbe was mutely weeping, or trying not to weep.

“I’m afraid papa *will* sell Trinket to that Miss Blair! and Dan won’t ever see her any more. He’ll grow thin—he won’t eat—”

“Dan will forget about Trinket in a little while. They do—horses do. That’s one good thing about being a horse, is n’t it?”

“But *we*’ll never see Trinket! I thought papa would take us out there some day and perhaps he’d let us ride her. But we don’t know Miss Blair!”

XXVI

IT took five days then for a letter from us to reach Boisé; six or seven, adding the stage-trip, to Silver City. There was nothing for it but to wait. Meantime a telegram dated New York came from Dick Grant asking if he might pay me a call between trains. He owed me nothing, not even a call. I had heard from him last in a very sweet, generous love-letter offering me once more what I had already twice declined. This time I repeated the refusal as firmly as I knew how, advising that we break off writing to each other as the surest cure for what could never be changed. It had proved so, as this visit was to witness.

We lunched together, young and old, Dick making a conquest of Mrs. Aylesford and making eyes at Phœbe at one and the same time. Phœbe made eyes back again quite as unembarrassed as he. He looked at her constantly and affectionately—it did one good to see him; and it did me good to hear him praise her when we three rambled off after luncheon; she sometimes beside him holding his hand, or skipping on ahead, her eyes afar, her lips moving slightly, half-smiling to herself in one of her dreams which the gallant presence of our visitor and his talk about the West inspired.

“But, see here!” he turned to me:—“I came to see you particularly. Are n’t we to have a little time to ourselves? I really want to speak to you.”

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His manner was a trifle shy, but his eyes meeting mine were not the eyes of a lover — not my lover. I suspected at once the nature of this impending talk. Phœbe was told to run into the house and see if grandmamma was all right (it was her custom to lie down after luncheon, but she did not sleep), and to ask if she would join us at tea before Dick left for his train. Phœbe, suspecting a ruse, hung about reluctant; but she went when my eye informed her there must be no trifling with orders, relying on the presence of a guest to escape compliance.

"Now, Dick, be quick," I said, "with your talk, for Phœbe is so charmed that *she* 'll be quick for fear of missing any more of you than she has to."

"I'll be quick," said Dick. — "Ah, *she*'s charming!"

"Who's charming?" I laughed at him.

"Phœbe," said he shamelessly. "I left a little girl like that in New York when I went to Idaho; the 'little girl next door.' I hardly had thought of her since. Last month I came home, — and, bless gracious! she was a woman — a woman of eighteen. The woman for me! . . . And now she's mine. Was n't that 'quick'? — yet not quick at all. It took eight years to find her — and to find myself, I guess. So slow, it might just have never been!"

"That's beautiful news, Dick! It's the right news for you, and for her too, I have n't a doubt. But you won't hurry her, will you? Eighteen is awfully young for marriage, and the West too."

"She's not going West. I've come home to stay.

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My father died last fall, you know? They need me at home; the business needs me."

"I'm sorry I did not know you had that sorrow, Dick. I should have wanted to write to you."

"I did n't write to you," said Dick. "It happened while I was still in Idaho—I was sure you'd have understood, though—just as sure as if you had written. We've stood a few things together."

"We have," I agreed; "and I think you are lovely to come and tell me this news yourself. Some day you will bring her. But you won't hurry her? Eighteen is very young."

"I shall hurry her. I'm not young. What do you say to thirty-one!"

"What do you say to thirty-three!"

"You don't mean it—not you!"

"I shall never see thirty-two again. Don't say I don't look it—I feel it; that's the main thing."

"But—how long is this to last? It's very comfortable and home-like here, but it's not a bit like you."

"How do you know what's like me!"

"What's narrow is not like you. This place has n't grown any in the last hundred years."

"The children are growing very nicely."

Dick looked at me gravely. "You speak of these children as if they were your own."

"I wish they were my own," I said.

"Yes; if they are so much to you, it's a pity they are not. Do you hear from their father often?"

"Phœbe hears once a week," I said.

"Then of course you know—"

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"What?" — my heart stopped.

"That he's coming on. I only heard it by accident — in the company's office. He had telegraphed them to expect him — I think very soon."

"How strange!" I breathed.

"It may have been quite sudden. Still, there was some talk of his going East when I left there a month ago. They were up at Silver City then, Mrs. Finley and Miss Blair; and Mr. Blair's private car was sitting out in the sagebrush all ready for the party to go aboard —"

"At Silver City! Is there a railroad —"

"No, no; at Boisé," said Dick. "The Short-Line's through to Boisé. The town turned out regularly to watch the car-crew dust her out and wash her down — the first magnate's car they'd ever seen. I understood Mr. Maclay expected to come on with them."

I prayed that Dick did not see how the blood had left my face. "Who," I asked, "are Mrs. Finley and Miss Blair?"

"Well; he's a curious man!" Dick ejaculated. "If you don't know that, what do you know?"

"Nothing," I said, "about him apparently. I suppose he thinks we are n't interested."

"Well; Boisé, you know, is always interested. Mrs. Finley is Major Finley's wife, the new commandant at the Barracks. Miss Blair is her sister, quite a beauty and a superb horsewoman. Mr. Blair is a great gun in the mining way. He's said to have the mines at Silver bonded for his syndicate; Maclay, of course,

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would n't speak of that —. And he's going to buy the mesa — build a big house out there. The ditch has gone through, not the old Eastern Canal, but one just as good and big enough for the mesa. All the valley there will blossom like the rose."

"Dick," I gasped, "just wait till I get my breath! Has any of this got anything to do with us — here? I don't mean mines and things — with Phœbe? What does it mean about Miss Blair, and coming East with her father?"

"It may mean only business. Mr. Blair is in big business, and Maclay is not far behind when there's any chance of a good deal. The gossips, of course, have it they're engaged. They were up there just before I came away, the whole party, Mr. Blair looking at mines. Maclay entertained them; they rode, Miss Blair rode, — he showed them around a bit. He was their host, of course. He was n't in the big house then, but he took them over it. I saw that myself. And the riding everybody saw. Miss Blair is a peach on horseback. She rode that dandy little mare of his — showed off her paces like a circus-queen. Then, as I say, they went all over the house — which made me rather hot!"

"What house?"

"How you cross-question!" said Dick. "You make a fellow afraid he's telling lies."

"Well, you know what house it was?"

"It was his house, the one he started — *they* started — to build, you know. It's up now, finished and furnished all through. A fine house for Silver City;

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rather big for one man to eat and sleep in. But you know all that?"

"I should n't ask you if I did. You make me feel ill! You must know what this means—"

Here Phœbe came towards us, running down the lane. She was in blue, sunlight through pale willow boughs sifting over her. Her hair in large, loose waves tumbled over her shoulders, the front lock turned aside and tied with a scarlet ribbon. There was little rose in her complexion, but the sun neither browned nor freckled it, only creamed it to the color of ivory. A little nose, a mouth with curly corners and a lovely pout to the upper lip which, with the steady regard of her dark gray eyes, gave the proud look to her face of intelligent innocence. Perfectly unconscious as yet, but capable of an effort to please as natural as the perfume of a flower.

"Look at that!" I said. "I am to lose that child. Five years I've had her for my own. No one in the world knows so much about her—five years! Dick, you kill me. If this is true—"

"Edith, I'm an ass!" Poor Dick was dreadfully disturbed by this outbreak. I was utterly reckless of his presence, as in fact I always had been. "Forgive me and don't think any more about it. You know what gossip is!"

"I know nothing. The fact that it's been kept quiet,—even the house!—writing to us every week, is all the proof I need that this thing is hanging over us. You have warned me in time. No one else shall see what you have seen."

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I don't know what Dick thought he saw in my agony. It did n't matter. He might be at times whatever he chose to call himself, he was always a gentleman. He loved me for the sorrow he had seen me bear, for the sorrow he believed I had still to bear. He took my hand and squeezed it hard.

"You are a great woman, Edith. It's cruel if it's true. But it's all for the best. You have given too much. Such love as you have given these children ought not to be at the mercy of any man—except he were your husband. It's time that it ended."

"I shall never suffer for anything I've given, nor regret anything I have n't got for what I've given." I tore away my hand, then I took his in both mine and returned the friendly grip. "Thank you, my dear Dick. I'm going to see about tea. Come to the house with Phœbe—not too soon!"

"You blessed girl! I'm an awful ass," he insisted, "but I love you."

"'Now we'll put on our feathers again,' said the plucked bird." This I remarked to myself with borrowed irony, on my way back to the house. Quotations were wasted on Dick. Men who can swear (I don't mean Dick), and women who can wail and rage, have an outlet that is denied to some of us. There remains the comfort of the right word. It's generally another's, but men's oaths, though "strange," are not often original. And the prophets of lamentation are very old.

The mesa going into the hands of Mr. Blair, and about to blossom with his money like the rose!

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There were other stabs meaner and smaller, there were wounds that went deeper, but that one fact—the mesa sold and no word said—that covered a great deal of history! Trinket, of course, must have been bought for Nanny: there was quite a history here, too, and some of it wretchedly misread. And now a lady who rode like a circus-queen was showing off her paces on the trails we had learned to know in those letters that we had taken as our excuse for silly castle-building. Riding, it so happened, was one of the things I had envied the so-called “rich.” It is certainly not for the daughters of poor artists in New York. Nanny had cantered over her country roads on the well-broken farm-horses, but she was no circus-queen. Nanny was better at planning houses—for strangers to live in. I had planned nothing, except a tombstone once—well; it was all of five years ago. It was even going on six.

Was I really fallen as low as this? Could n't I forgive the man his happiness? No; but his silence was the insult that made all the rest so estranging. Why, even Dick had flown to me with his news! *He* had n't suspected me of grudging vanity, the sourness of the supplanted. He had n't even apologized to himself for the little fact that he had more than once proposed to me, and that I was not his first.

Shall I ever forget that tea! Mrs. Aylesford, peaceful and smiling, ignorant of this blow; myself trying to pretend I was a “sport” and a good loser, after the exhibition I had made; Phœbe joyous (on the eve of a new mother) and unconcerned except with

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the nature of the layer-cake Mary had sent in—if the dark streaks were chocolate or blackberry jelly. And then our walk with Dick to his train and the few minutes' wait till the accommodation from Poughkeepsie came hooting out of the tunnel and slowed down. Dick on the rear platform of the last car waved his white straw hat to us; he looked young and gay in his Eastern clothes that fitted a happy man who has divorced the grimy West and given up spurs and Stetson hats, and fallen into step on the pavement. I knew he would never forget my frightful "give-away," but I was safe with Dick—though he was to marry a school-girl. The world of the young and happy closed its doors as the train swept out of sight. Phœbe and I went up the hill to hear grandmamma chat about Dick and ask questions about our friendship out West when we had seen so much of each other. I wondered what she would say if I should suddenly break out and tell her of his passion for Nanny, or, for that matter, his later passion for myself! Instead I told her he was going to be married and treated the happy event as if it had been the first of the kind in his young career. Thus we tried to amuse each other in this house that lived in the past or in a future beyond our control, from which we must hide our private hopes and perilous imaginings. The only safety lay in the fact that Miss Blair also was young and gay and might not care to be cumbered with a big girl like Phœbe, another woman's child. A father who had not seen her in five years could not miss her much in reality.

XXVII

THE question now was, whether to prepare Mrs. Aylesford? I dreaded her false happiness when the telegram should come saying that *he* was on his way to us at last. Dick had endeavored to discount his news as gossip, but any one could see what Dick believed. Should I leave her to take it as it came? I knew how astounding and quick Douglas could be when he had made up his mind to declare some proposed action which he looked at from his own point of view. Here again I was entangling myself with my point of view. In no one's eyes but ours would this announcement be held astounding. He would be simply and heartily congratulated by almost every one he knew except ourselves. He had waited a decent time; he was normal—we were the cloistered, wrapped in dreams. Mrs. Aylesford herself could not call it unseemly or pretend to think it too soon. Had n't she offered him to me? Pray Heaven she had not offered me to him! It was this fear that decided me to sound her, through the effect of my later news, as to what she might have written. If my suspicions were correct, I knew her face would confirm them; the helpless confession of her manner would tell me the truth. There might be time to forestall or nullify that letter which never should have gone.

I did prepare her. I was as careful as I dared be,

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for I must not minimize too much. I drew no conclusions ; here were certain facts — she must judge for herself how much they meant, or if they meant anything at all.

She wilted under them like a frosted flower. She paled and grew faint. The whispered words escaped her : “ What have I done ! ” It was enough. She was past the power to speak, though not actually unconscious, barely breathing, white as the wall. And again her strength left her for days . . . for all the days before his telegram which came at last. He was in New York ; he would be with us by the afternoon train — that same day.

I shall not go far into the details of our meeting, after those five and a half years — so long looked forward to, so ghastly in the realization. But there was the children’s unconsciousness to save us : Phœbe’s beautiful, shy joy and dawning remembrance, Billy-boy’s sturdy looks of distrust at the stranger who stared so hard, and boldly took him on his knee. Billy was like his mother, but more gorgeous, a developed rose in his richer blondness and his features of a young Proteus. Nanny had not given him those regular features ; still he had her firm jaw and he stuck it out manfully at the stranger’s liberties. One could have laughed at those two, the man and the man-child, measuring each other with steady eyes. I think I did laugh, and then I left the room.

At this time he had not seen Mrs. Aylesford who could only welcome him in her bed. She had been trembling all over with the excitement of keeping

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up; she wished to be made neat, as she called it, but I knew she meant fine: her very best cap; the daintiest of her little bed-wraps about her shoulders; the pillow-cases fresh that she was propped against. So I dressed her as a lamb for the sacrifice, jeering at my own thoughts. And then I told him she was ready. He, of course, would tell her first.

As to his manner to me — I had not looked close enough to observe. He was deeply stirred, but there had been plenty to stir him. This visit went to the very roots of the past he had come to bury, to part from decently leaving a few flowers of regret upon the grave — bearing away our living flowers, leaving us the regrets. I was an insane recluse to see so much tragedy in it.

My own private tragedy I took out of doors to the old place; under the willows on the wayside stones. All was silent in the lane, the willows' light leafage barely stirred. And yet I dared not sit there and think. I must command myself for my own turn on the rack. It was coming — he was coming; and because Phœbe was not with him, I knew that *it* was coming. I rose and went to meet it.

His eyes were difficult to sustain as they sought mine. Obligated to look at him, it seemed there were fresh traces of sorrow in his face since I had seen it last, the ravages of loneliness, of the slow, drudging years. It softened me a little: why should I be so hard to this poor human man, with half his life before him, homeless, wifeless, a concentrated, unsocial mind.

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I asked, to gain time, how he had found Mrs. Aylesford — how did she look to him?

He thought her looking very frail; she struck him as very much altered. "You did not give me the impression in your letters that she had failed so much."

She had n't, I said, until the last month or so.

"Has she had anything like a stroke?"

I knew what sort of stroke he meant, but I played on the word bitterly. "Yes; she has had something very like a stroke. . . . Did she bear the meeting with you pretty well?" I trembled to ask.

"She seemed to," he said, "but she struck me as very nervous, very much excited. I did n't stay with her long."

Then he had n't told her! He had n't dared to tell her,—to strike a grandmother when she was "down."

"I'm afraid you have n't come for long, Douglas," I urged him recklessly. "If you have come for any special reason, let us get it over with."

He drew his breath in hard. Well I remembered that sign in him that took the place of words under strong emotion! This man could not get things over with as easily as Dick. "Do you not know why I have come, Edith?"

"I may have guessed," I said. "But you have left it all to guessing."

"Have I?" he retorted. "Could n't you read anything between the lines of my letters, all these years?"

"Reading what is not written in letters is n't a very safe thing to do, when the writers are as far apart

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as we have been. I did not look for anything between your lines."

"You were silent enough!" he said in a tone that sounded bitter too (why should he be bitter!) "I don't know that I should ever have come but that I must come—I have to come! We must get it over with, as you say. I have waited five years and longer—is n't it enough?"

"Enough—for what!" I cried,— "for whom? What have I to do with your waiting those five years!"

He repeated the words slowly: "What have you to do with those five years! If you have guessed why I am here, why do you torment me? Why have you been so silent? I laid out my heart to you as a man can who is denied the right to speak like a man. You might have foreshadowed your answer, at least,— given me a hint one way or another. Where do I stand? Is there to be nothing more between us— nothing but silence?"

"If there is anything more you will have to speak plain, Douglas. I don't know what you have got on your mind—not from any words of yours."

"Then, to speak plain, — God help us, — I ask you once more to be my wife."

"Thank you," I said. "Before I answer, I must ask you this: did you get a letter from Mrs. Aylesford before you came East this last time?"

"I have not been East before this — one winter I was as far East as Chicago. I dared not come here then —"

"I asked you a question."

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"You appear to know that a letter was sent? I never imagined, of course, that you could have known its contents. As Mrs. Aylesford did not tell you what she wrote, do you think I should?"

"I think you must," I said, "before we go any further. I have reason to suppose that letter was about me."

"It was much more about me."

"Did it bring you on here to ask me to be your wife — in the fear of God?" I taunted.

He was stung by that, but he made no retort in kind.

"It gave me courage to come — the courage you have steadily denied me, crushing my hopes as fast as they grew. You know I was not looking for a wife when I spoke to you on the mesa! I was not speaking to Any Woman, but you implied just that — when you said you were glad to share the 'insult' (with my wife) rather than have it go to some other woman who might not answer me as I deserved. Edith, if I could forgive *that*, you ought to be able to forgive the rest! I thought you were the one woman who could understand! It was the highest trust I could show you. I put our case in your hands, knowing how you loved my child, how you felt about her mother — There we were between the devil and the deep sea: would you take the plunge with me? — the sea at least was clean. I thought you could face it with a breadth like that of the dead, if death is what we think it is. . . . I was wrong, of course. I was mad. You gave me a horrible lesson. Since

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then you have never been out of my mind. I have lain awake nights hounded by your speeches. I have waked from sound sleep pursued by things you were saying to me in dreams that literally made me sweat — your words burned scars into me that I shall carry all my life. Never did a man see himself so hideous in a woman's eyes; and such a woman — such a woman!

“Now that is done! Now I offer you my five years' humiliation, my unceasing thought of you and sense of your injustice. You were wrong, in a woman's way, — not wrong as to the principle — wrong as to me. I must have either loved you or hated you. How could I not love you! I have not a young man's love to offer — will you take the love of my forty years?”

I was dazed. “Wait; let me think.” His face contracted with a spasm of pain. Had I said those words to him before? — they had a strange, deadly familiarity — I went on hastily to cover them.

“A year ago, if you had come and asked me to marry you, I believe I would have taken you, without any love — for Phœbe's sake, and to keep the children in the family — without any love of yours or mine. Just a sane, respectable marriage such as the world approves. I could have given you my sincere friendship and a larger faith than we need speak of now. Now, I demand more — and I have less faith. I must examine this love of your forty years. What do I know of you, Douglas? What do I know of your life which I should have to share? I don't know even the names of your friends who are your guests — in the

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house you have built which I suppose you intend me to live in? You have been writing to us every week, and it is Dick Grant who comes to pay me a call who tells me casually this house is built and furnished, and that you are taking your friends over it —”

“Damn Dick!”

That was all he said; — he left me in the road where we had been talking and turned his back on me and went towards the house alone. And once more, when it was too late, I heard my own words as he must have heard them. I did not wait for his return; I knew he would not return. I had insulted him again and for the last time. I sprang up and followed till I caught up with him and could lay my hand on his arm.

“Douglas,” I cried, breathless; “if you still care for me, after what you heard me say, here I am! — Won’t you look at me?”

He looked, and his eyes were hot with pain, — the indignant, wounded look which also I remembered.

“Oh, you woman of words! Do you mean anything by what you are saying, or is it more of your damnable torment?”

“I mean — if you will only believe me — will you take the love of my thirty-three years?”

He stared and stared; he hardly believed me even then. “Is it finished?” he demanded, without coming nearer. “Is there any other test you want to put me to?”

“I don’t know what more I can say,” I answered. That was the end of words between us. . . . What

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followed was my first sample of the love of his forty years. It left me with a sense of insufficiency. This evidently was not the woman's hour, not when the woman is thirty-three. As moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, did not fully meet the case. I did not believe I was a "Cousin Amy." No; it must be that I had made the grand mistake. I did not love the man after all. Should I even be able to endure his love?

These chilling reflections I recall for the benefit of any sister-spinster who has postponed her betrothal kiss as late as I did mine—her thoughts taken up meanwhile with other things. And, since the poets speak for us on these occasions, there is another poet who says:—

"Weep no more ! oh, weep no more!
Young buds sleep at the root's white core."

The seasons take care of themselves; all we need to do is to see that the root be sound and clean. But I was thinking just then of my own sad season when romance has had its day. I felt so much more like crying than being kissed. I did cry—on his manly breast in womanly fashion, and that seemed much more like what to myself I called the real thing. I liked his awkward arm around me and his rough coat (smelling of cigars) next my cheek, and the man's heart pounding beneath it. That great power-house of passion filled me with wonder and a sort of awe. How could it be mine?—and how came it to be mine?—and when did all this begin? If this were

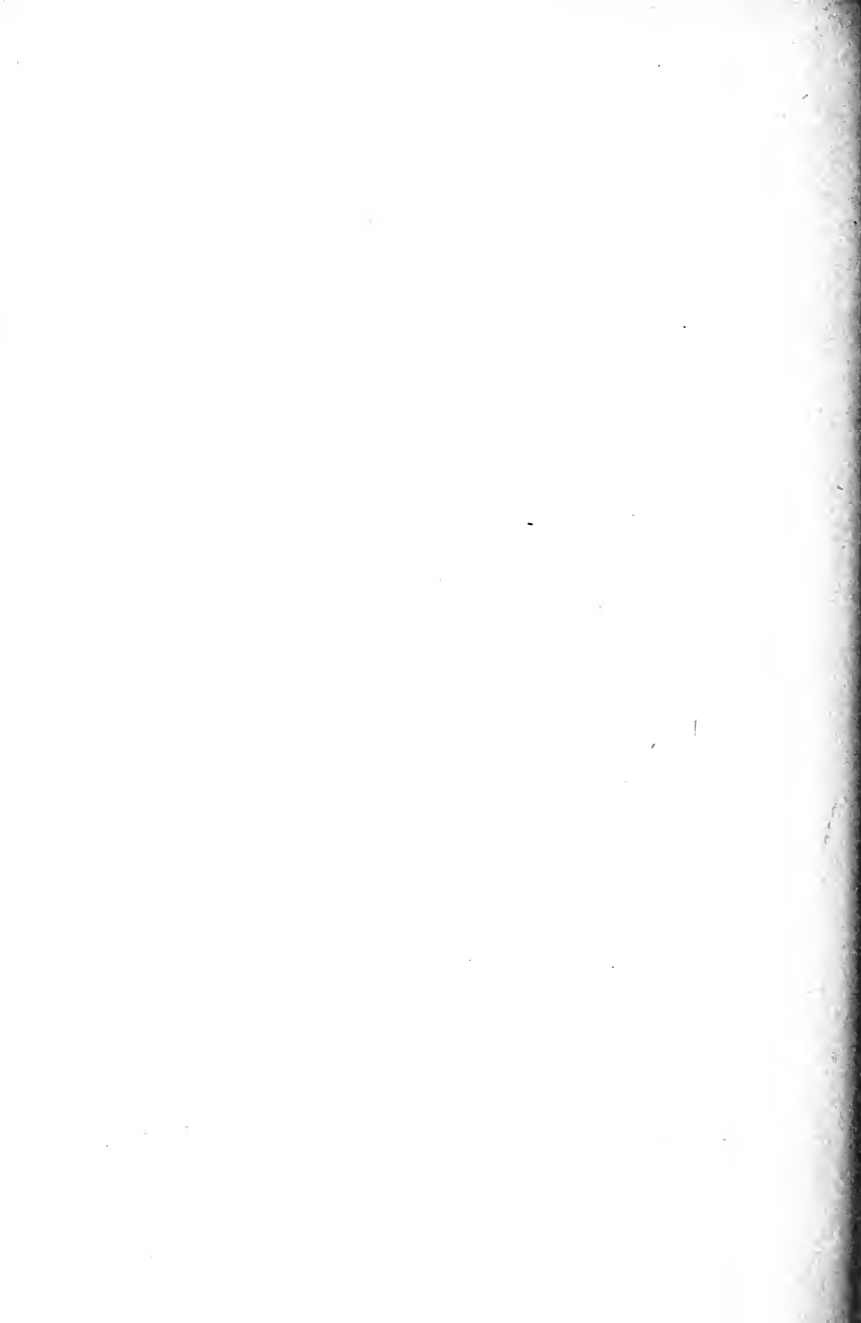
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bliss, its neighbor easily was pain — pain that did not even dissemble itself as bliss.

How strange to be thinking like this, detached, in his very arms while he was simply, honestly feeling! How poverty-stricken seemed all this petty analysis; had I lost the power to lose myself? I ached thinking of my girl days gone, of those sad, stern "forty years" that belonged to Nanny, robbed by death. She had earned them; she had given them to me, and the child of her pain and care. I must keep these treasures precious, and share them and pass them out and on — Perhaps this is what is meant by the love that seeketh not its own? If there is any such human love, the name of it on earth is Friendship.



PART VII
OURSELVES



XXVIII

THIS was but the beginning, the anguished, half-stifled, hurried birth of our love so long maturing blind and silent, according to nature's law. We had three days, three marvelous days as long as many years, before he left us to complete the arrangements for our wedding which for practical reasons had to be very quick, almost immediate. We went very shyly into the depths, but we found no bottom. I no longer feared to sound him. I looked all around him as far as I could see, and still he remained a mystery. But I could laugh in weak joy over some of his self-revelations — so boyish, so unbelievably ingenuous — this man I had called hard! How little they live inside, I thought, compared to us; how blessedly objective they are!

We had long evening talks with the elders, and walks by ourselves when they were in bed. We discussed the children and plans for their futures which should involve the fewest wrenches. Mr. and Mrs. Aylesford stoutly claimed that they had no claims! nor were they going to feel the wrenches. All must be done from the children's side of the question, though Mrs. Aylesford did not forget their father so long deprived. Phoebe would go with us, and Billy-boy was to remain with nurse Roberts under the grandparents' roof. The farm was his best school-

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house for some time to come, with Jonas for his tutor in its various branches of nature-study. Phœbe would learn to ride (and I should learn to ride, and be able to test my theory that I had an affinity for horses). And the lessons would go on, with many a joyous interlude such as "out West" affords.

And then I was his wife — after a quiet wedding, only the family present. I'm obliged to own that my dear Essie, and Jack whom I like so much, were the only flat-notes — very tactful but somehow inadequate. It was not an occasion for irony, even implied, and presented from the side of humor.

But on our way back from our short wedding-journey, we saw them again in New York and all went merry as it should with such a merry pair as they and such a happy pair as we. Essie and I spent a morning appropriate to my character of stepmother rather than bride, going over a Children's Emporium to choose Phœbe's outfit for the West. I had only to give her age and select the style of garment : — she was so symmetrically made and so normal physically that she simply stepped into her new suits and "became them," as Roberts said, as if they had been made for her.

And then one night at ten o'clock, we went aboard the Pacific Limited (the train that hooted past us at Lime Point and saw us not), where most of the Pullman passengers were already in their berths. We passed down the curtain-lined aisle to the little "drawing-room" where Phœbe and I were to keep house with papa next door for our favored visitor.

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And oh, what a happy child it was ! It was a happy journey, but few journeys of a new-married couple have that element added. It was beautiful to us both to watch Phœbe's joy, her father recovered after his long, mysterious absence ; her remembrance of him not clouded, only saved up — They were happy together as in our best days on the mesa ; those evenings when they played "store" on the parapet, and I watched them from the steps till bedtime came. She was no longer little "Rappacini's Daughter." She could sit in his lap and dress him up in weirdly unbecoming head-gears and examine him as her property, till Aunt Edith (I was to remain "Aunt Edith") interrupted and sent him away to the smoking-car. She chattered while she undressed, delaying things as always when she was happy ; not talking to any one in particular — just twittering as birds that nestle for the night.

When she was safe launched on the tide of dreams, we would sit by the window, our lights out, and watch the world fly past us mile after mile. Its own lights were enough to see it by, — long stretches of country under the moon or stars or sinking into dusk ; hamlets with scattered house-lights, single rays from lonely homes ; then the cities we clanged through, where we shrank back from the glare of station-lights and arc-lights, and crowds staring at the train with its long line of closely inhabited sleepers, a train made up of sleepers, for the nights and days of a continental journey. Distance and space do count.

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We talked like sober married folk, and these to me were the most wonderful talks that most recalled, without their fears, my best days on the mesa when we discussed the common things. He talked of "our" mines which Mr. Blair would probably buy—the whole group—for his syndicate. The mesa had not been sold, but—here my husband hesitated: "You know you said—"

"I remember what I said!—and I take it back. I *do* want to see the place again. It would be the thing I should love best to go back there with you and Phoebe, and to have you ride out as you did, and give your call, and not to be afraid of each other. And to sit on the bluff when Phoebe is in bed—and one thing more! You won't laugh?"

"Am I likely to laugh!" he groaned. Apparently he was n't quite sure even yet that we could talk in this careless fashion—about the mesa.

"I want to go up the windmill ladder sometime when Phoebe can't see me, or she might want to do it too. I should like to sit up there on the platform in the moonlight and see what can be seen, and 'consider from thence.'"

"You won't see much if you wait for moonlight."

"I shall feel what can't be seen. It must be wonderful! Will the sails sweep us off?"

"I'm glad to hear you aren't going up alone! No; we'll unship the rudder and the sails will be still."

"Ah, much better! I should hate a noise up there. Are you laughing at me?"

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He did not laugh. I knew we should do it some day and many other things as foolish. It might be foolish to sell the mines and go back to the mesa and put the money in the ground again. But this is what he proposed. Because, he said, Silver City was too high—women and children, and horses, did not do well if they remained there many years. And as we had waited so long (!) we must not waste time now in separations. There were great possibilities in a tract of a thousand acres like the mesa, with water upon it.

So, perhaps, some day it may blossom like the rose—blossom for us and the children.

Aunt Essie's letter accompanying her wedding-present, which we received a month later, is almost worth quoting as a last word from my own side of the family. It is mostly about myself, or Aunt Essie's fancies about me at the time of writing. It suited her mood, having just heard of my marriage, to treat it in this picturesque vein. She is also rather thrilled when any of the family does anything to support her theory that we are all a trifle mad!

Her present was quite mad. She boasted of the fact. It was a sixteenth-century bedspread of Byzantine lace over a hand-loom silk of the same period. "Royal dukes have slept under it," she wrote, "with their duchesses (or ladies not their duchesses)—horrid deeds I've no doubt have been plotted under it by those who could n't and did n't deserve to sleep. Use it in your pine-board cabin if you have one, or

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in your tent. It's just as appropriate to your mode of life as you are to the American frontier !

"I'm not surprised, of course. Places like that Hudson River farm are fatal to imaginative girls. You are a Telemachus, supposing he had had the soul of his father which he might have had, in spite of Homer and Tennyson—I can think of you on your shut-in shore watching the lights on boats loaded with passengers for the city, thinking of the liners at their docks waiting to cast off. You wanted a comrade to fly with—it's much the same as if you had jumped into the river. You are mad, but it's no new madness. You are as mad as Essie, yet somehow I love and pity you more.

"I've been making my will—the amusement proper to my years. Your Uncle Charles has been very decent, but in any case I think I shall probably outlive him (I feel doomed to go on forever). I have left Essie one third more than you, but I leave you enough love—though you don't care for it—to make up. Essie has those children, and she will have more ! If I were to wish for you I should pray that you may have no children of your own. You would manage a mixed family, I dare say, better than most women, but it's a thankless task. Your life will 'compose' better, as your poor father would say, if you stick to the stepmother sacrifice as you have begun. Confine yourself to the children you married for. Essie thinks that is the whole reason—I do not.

"Farewell, sweetest, dearest, cleverest, and maddest of all the mad Bonhams. I really in the bottom

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of my heart love your madness, but don't carry it too far ! ”

I carried my madness certainly as far as to have children of my own, though we have n't laid much emphasis on the possessive, in our “ mixed family,” as Aunt Essie would call us. For obvious reasons Billy, across the continent, could not be as close to my arms and thoughts as my own two sons, nor as near in any sense as Phœbe. But he was nearer to Mrs. Aylesford, and dearer than any of her grandchildren, including my Bonham and Aylesford (named for her), whom she counted as her own blood. Those dear people !—they made it so in their wills, dividing the inheritance that was Phœbe's and Billy's into four equal portions in favor of my children. Of course we think we can count on our boys to put that right when they are of age. The recognition is more than any legacy to me.

Though Mrs. Aylesford had always looked so much the frailer of those two, he went first, by nearly five years. She passed those years with many hours of silence, at peace with the fact of waiting, at peace with all that goes with it at her age. She accepted her loneliness, her almost total deafness ; she bore with the infirmities of old servants whom she would not replace. She devoted her time to the petty cares connected with the property which she already regarded as “ the children's.” She was patient, wistfully patient, under the little misunderstandings that result from deafness and forgetfulness and failing powers.

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But there was no failure when it came to a decision of the heart.

It was a fact we had known for some time, but could not bring ourselves to speak of, that the old home was not the best place any longer for Billy, who was a big boy in the First Form at St. Paul's. We thought she did not see it, but she had seen it, as soon perhaps as we did. She made up her mind slowly as old people do, reluctant to face the change; she gave him up of her own choice, though with him went the last of her motherhood, and her active interest in life was ended. She wrote carefully, explaining all those reasons we had known — why he must not come back that year for his long vacation, nor any year as an understood thing. A simple, wise, and beautiful letter which I shall keep for those who come after us to show the heart of a perfect grandmother.

That heart, so strong in the workings of affection, no longer functioned well as a means of life for her. She had nights — not every night, but sometimes many in succession — when each breath she drew lying down, or even half-lying propped on pillows, was an effort she might well have wished could be her last. A little cushioned frame had been made for her on which she leaned her head and arms in a sitting position; she rested so, when she could rest, for hours in the night, dozing at intervals, while the nurse slept sound beside her bed. She was always unwilling to keep any one awake who had earned and could enjoy the blessing of sleep.

On one of those cold winter mornings, on the

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Hudson, the nurse slept on till broad daylight. She saw the shawled figure in the familiar attitude, the tired head bent down on the arms crossed beneath it — silent, but so still! Troubling no one, asking no assistance, the dear woman had gone as she would have wished to go.

Of all the beautiful lives I have known, hers I think was the sweetest, the most selfless, through and through, the most innocent of blame. Her passing was like the cold, sweet withering of an autumn rose. To the last she was still a rose.

.
In thinking over what I have written of Nanny — of our friendship, which I have made so much of — I wonder if I have idealized it beyond what will seem real? There may be those who would say there never was a friendship so brief, so young, that could so take hold on the imagination as to affect and even alter the entire life of the one who survived its close. I can only say that close was not the end. Its flower was brief — our friendship here — but it did not die when the flower faded. Fruit of the soul it meant to me. How it has gone with her beyond the bounds of silence, who knows? Perhaps she looks back on her few years here with us and wonders at these tributes we render on our knees, who loved her so frankly and humanly: laughed with her and at her, disputed her views, put her up to little ways of the world, as I used — discussing the fashions and the men and women of the world she scarcely knew — almost, one can fancy the tender derision of our beloved dead.

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They cannot have lost their humility nor their humor. And perhaps they would ask us, if they could, to forget them a little more, to spare them excessive regrets and a too uplifted worship of their human memory, or exaggerated importance given to their place left vacant, knowing as they must the unimportance of any one's place and the endless shifts of fate.

No; I am willing to concede that my girl friend was perhaps as other girls, as I was myself, when we chose each other at sight, disdaining estimates and comparisons; no less it was a marriage of true minds, such minds as we had — and then Death took it suddenly and set it in the stars beyond the reach of commonplace and of petty disillusionments. It outlasted death and I believe it would have outlasted even life — even if we had both lived to learn each other's faults and forgive them as women — to have parted, as we must, for long periods, keeping our love alive through intensive thinking and in letters constant and intimate as those of sisters — more constant and much more intimate than mine and Essie's. That sound, good human friendship was denied us; its incorruptible part was left, my part, which I believe, as nearly as it can on earth, matches her part — wherever she is in this long silence.

If that does not seem real to those who are in the busy life of the world, it was real enough to me in my solitudes, in a round of cares centered in her children (of the man she loved) whom her love could not reach, but mine could — If I have been able to keep faith in that way, Nanny dear, our love indeed has

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been an "ever-fixed mark that looks on tempest and is never shaken."

No; there was not the slightest possibility for Douglas and me that our marriage, impossible as it seemed, could have turned out to be a mistake, with *that* beginning, or that our children should have come into the world to mark it a failure. Of them I could be only too happy to talk! But herein lies a distinction that brings in the oneness of the relation; I could say anything I wished, of Billy and Phœbe, but when it comes to my "own" there comes too the touch of self-consciousness.

And so of the man who is so close to one. I have said a great deal in these pages about my husband, before he was my husband—I handled him freely once and with words to spare. Lightnings and thunder come with the storm, and words are torn from us in the tempest-times of our lives, and dead words we wish had died unborn choke the old paths of memory and mark with waste the track of the storm that is past. But, when the clear, dark nights of stars return,—our stars that we see from that "top of the world," as we call the mesa,—or the white nights that steep the earth in moonlight; when the long days of summer's fruition are with us again and the shortening days bring back the ancient sadness of the harvest-burdened year, we do not complain of these seasons of blessedness that they are not prolific of sound. And so my story, that began late as a love-story, must end as the happy love-stories do end—in silence: as life shall end for us all at last.

LATER WORDS, BY PHCÆBE

THIS is the record as our Beloved left it. She never spoke of it to me but once, and then deliberately, as if she wished to explain — perhaps to herself also — how it had come to be written.

“I meant it for you, I think, as a legacy,” she said, “from my private life to yours. I wanted you to know some day, so far as I know it, the story of your two mothers, of the bond between them, and how your father came into it — had to come — which made us just the family we are. But,” she added, “it would never have been written except under the pressure, day after day, of those first years at Lime Point. What we call the tides of life had risen high just before that sudden check that left me full of towering recollections and thoughts that, in that house, were literally unspeakable! The contrast between your dear grandmother’s reveries in those days and mine! So I talked to myself on paper — hours, alone — as people who are going out of their minds talk aloud when there is no one there. I talked to you and fancied you were the woman I knew you would be some day, who would understand.

“The greater part — all the hardest part — was written that first winter, before I could have known what was the truth. Afterwards I had to finish or destroy what I had done. Nothing is true, you know, till it is finished — till we are finished.”

LATER WORDS, BY PHŒBE

She smiled and, after thinking, added: "I wonder if it is true! I was reading over my dear father's letters at that time, and they were another human document—very human! They were exciting and stimulating, but they were most disturbing. They irritated me in a way that strikes me now as funny!—considering what I had then attempted to do myself. It really annoyed me very much that my own father who was so clever did not seem to have been clever enough to tell the truth, exactly, about any person he was speaking of, or any circumstance he related, or any place he was supposed to describe. I remembered some of the persons myself, and had seen a good many of the places.

"He was one of the sincerest men that ever lived; he must have believed he was telling the truth, but he never by any chance did tell it, — the whole truth, things in their right proportions, — so that any one could gather it from what he said at the time. The time and the mood had so much to say to him. And he had such an overflowing fancy of his own, a petted fancy that had always had its own way.

"Now, I wonder, Phœbe dear," — she smiled at me, deep into my eyes in a quiet, candid way she had of looking at us she loved (oh, the beautiful eyes we shall never see again!) — "I wonder," she emphasized, "whether when you come to read my 'remains' you will have that teased sense of inaccuracy almost willful — certainly needless — that used to provoke me to contradict my dear father in his grave! — Partly for his own sake; his moods and fancies were not

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the best part of him. Well ; I was the victim of moods and fancies, too, as you will see. If there is anything *you* would like to contradict when you read me — I that was so critical of my own father — do so, dear ! I shall be thankful. Who would n't be, to be spared doing an injustice in one careless sentence, perhaps, when just adding another sentence or changing the emphasis a little would make it nearer right ?

“ ‘ If this be error and upon me proved, ’ ” she threw in with her beaming smile, “ then deal with me and my document accordingly ! You must spare me the hurt of hurting others when it's too late for me to alter anything I have said, or had better not have said.”

Her mind to the last found its best companionship in the words of the old poets of her youth that she knew by heart (that she taught to my little mother) — old quotes that used to make her “ greet ” as she would say, smiling. And they were her mental toys in lighter speech, when she wished to hide emotion she no longer dared to trifle with. As she grew older, and became absorbed in public events, her reading-appetite craved whatever was written of importance bearing on the political tendencies of the nations that were drifting towards this vortex. Many of her friends were more lately traveled in those countries, but she saw them, I thought, in a larger way, reflectively, and she had her own words for describing them. France, she said, has always been spoken of in metaphors because she fires the imagination. She was the bright light of Europe passed from hand to hand and

LATER WORDS, BY PHOEBE

shaken in the wind, but now the flame pointed upward and burned still and clear as the candles on a shrine. England she scolded as we scold the one we love best of all — the one we cannot bear should go wrong! When England had made the great choice in this war, she said, "Now we can trust the end! In saving her own honor and herself, she has saved the world." What she prayed for next was our own testimony — which never came! She died, alas, in the war's darkest year and in the depths of our own quibbling neutrality.

The profound emotions of the war had seemed to act at first as a tonic; she was distinctly stronger, less indifferent, than at any time since her widowhood. But then came the steady heart-grind, the lists of the dead, the sorrows of her friends abroad, the unimaginable suffering, our own lost opportunity that wore on her — the low number we were to take in the Great Examination. I think it hastened the end for her. She overtaxed her mind in proportion to her feelings. She read — she devoured — everything about the war, turning from the subject suddenly and burying herself in the past, only to come upon it there, in clairvoyant sentences that sound to-day like prophecy, weird warnings that were treated as rhetoric, menaces that we played with.

On her bedside table were always one big ancient and one big modern. She read them in the long hours of her wakeful nights — those nights of her immeasurable grief! What else she did in those lonely vigils we could only guess by her delicate white face

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and ravaged looks in the morning. Yet she said she was glad to know—to suffer in his footsteps, though not for long—what he had suffered in his youth and strength, when he lost my mother!

Could one woman honor another's memory more than that? Can dignity and generosity of a "second wife" towards her husband's "first," go any further! That was Aunt Edith—"mother," queen of all mothers, perfect in love, in friendship, in magnanimity, the soul of friendship, which came as natural to her as vanity and selfishness to smaller natures.

It is not for me to discuss them, to take stock of their different qualities and capabilities—my two mothers, now that both are gone. Each would have shrunk from the thought of such comparison. But I know that my own mother would have said that her friend was incomparably the greater person—and for herself she would have asked no praise beyond the fact: "Edith loved me as I am." . . . It is enough, and it does n't matter. But of course *that* is one of the self-evident truths Aunt Edith would never have recognized and could not have brought out in her own story.

Also, in one part of the narrative—that part which must have been "hardest to write"—she has left an impression most natural at the time, but I think she herself would have straightened it if she had not been so reluctant to go back over those pages. It concerns the little town that used to be called "The City of the Desert Plains." It really is very much of a city now and the plains are no more a desert.

LATER WORDS, BY PHŒBE

Boisé was our home address for the nine happy years we lived on the mesa. Father disposed of his mining interests very soon after we went back to Idaho. We moved down to the mesa in the opening spring. The years that followed, of its resurrection as a home, the re-sowing and re-timbering of the land, which to a child of my age were as one long holiday, must have been to Aunt Edith, with all the happiness, a time of care and stress. Her life was never easy, never idle, but in those years she was occupied in very vital ways: it was then she became "mother"—Bonham and Aylie, the two dear brothers she gave the family, were both born on the mesa, very close to each other. And there was another boy baby who only lived a short while. It was after I was married and a mother, I first learned what that time had meant to her. She had to go away, I remember, to get well; and I was struck by a new look in her face when she came back to us. But I had never really seen her with fresh eyes before—eyes of a child old enough to know how beautiful she was. Such deep, sweet acquiescence in everything.—Is it likely she would have wanted to hold up to scorn the place that was made so sacred to her—where, on the little hill beside my mother, her own baby child, the last she was to bear, was laid?

There could not have been much time for what is called social intercourse with the town, three miles away. Yet so little "intercourse" is needed when people feel right towards one another. She felt that way to everybody; she had outgrown all small re-

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sentments, if she ever had any. You saw it in her face. Father and she picked and chose as to friends, but one does that everywhere, and I am sure they found the stuff of long friendships there.

It was a town of mixed periods of settlement and many mixed elements, and the dregs I suppose were still at the bottom, but they were not spilled all over us as they seem to have been over her, that first difficult summer when she was so defenseless. The place, as she has left it in this part of her story, quite understandably, seems like a sink of ignorance and narrowness and gossip of the crudest kind. But that is not our Boisé!

It is a forward-looking, a brilliant little center for a country waking up—you would hear of enterprises now that sound like fairy-tales. They were conceived and worked out by men of unusual parts at various times separated by long intervals of harrowing patience. There is always a fund of general capacity to draw upon in these little towns that were so far ahead, in their dreams, of any possible reality; that have gazed on poverty and loneliness and failure and hopes in ruins, and learned to do everything while they waited except give up. The town has kept on with its fight for homes in the desert, and all manner of lesser fights have been lost and won in between the physical fight with nature—some of them very great little victories on questions of principle that strike hands with good citizenship the country over and the credit of the whole nation. But that story does n't come into the present one and is

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far beyond the power even to suggest, of one who was only a child, growing up on the mesa.

What we did was to look across at sunset when the town was half-lost in colored haze and say, "How pretty!" and point to the foothills like crumpled velvet piled up in soft light behind it. Prettier still after dark with its lights pricked out on the distance,—more and more lights behind trees hiding the river, more and more single, straggling lights along the roads and sprinkled over the valley. We children mourned! because the farms were crowding out our beloved sage—our old dusty desert lap rising in perspective as we looked off—the yellow curtain that hung like a flag of quarantine once between our sickness and the town. Now it was such a checkered curtain!

We growled! But mother said, "It's one of these facts, you know, that the water we could n't live here without brings them too, and their little new-shingled houses are just as beautiful to them as our big bare windy shelf is beautiful to us."

How we fought—how *they* fought—for those free, simple lines, in the teeth of every professional gardener they tried; Aden, who was not strong in technique, but knew something of the soil and of us and what we wanted, looking on in satiric silence. They had a succession of obstinate, soulless Germans who knew everything! who wanted to plant everything, specially bulbs, in platoons and lay us out in flower-beds. And what they weren't allowed to do when the parents were on the ground, they did do, firmly,—because they knew they were right,—as soon as

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their blessed backs were turned, and were "fired" in consequence feeling misunderstood and deeply injured by the ignorance of their idiotic employers. Those German gardeners alone could almost make one understand this war!

But now our lawn has kicked its German flower-beds off the edge, so to speak,—nothing is allowed thereon but the shadows that belong, our time-keepers and sentinels that march across the bluff;—shadows of the new house (it was new a good many years ago), and of the poplars that soar above the roofs and usher you into the court the house is built around. It opens towards the east, and on three sides the upper story projects the width of a corridor supported on pillars swathed in rose-vines, which gives us our cool, shady cloisters beneath; where little Bon used to go to sleep wheeled softly in his baby-carriage; where father used to smoke on moonlight nights when there was too wild a wind in front; walking with our dear one at his side—tall in her white dresses, lovely, oh, so lovely! the little dark classic head! how she belonged to courts and moonlight—the house he built for her, the house of their romance. Father felt, I think, though he never said such things, that she was of an older world than ours; she kept it in the background, but you felt that she had it, the memories of historic places and a richer human past than we could gather around us. And yet the real romance of that house was founded on the time when she was mothering me out there alone in the heat and dust and grime!

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Beauty was the breath of life to her — she brought it by her very presence wherever she went ; but her thoughts could make any place beautiful, and she accepted as her lot *anything* life offered at the hands of love and experience.

If you live in a great bare land of sunshine you learn the value of shadows. Our shadows on the mesa had the reality for us, when we were children, of members of the family. They made their rounds of the lawn and the house as if they had taken the "job" for life. At night, when the moon rose big over the back-lands, a fresh group filled the court who were periodical visitors and brought with them the spirit of romance. Then the little cloistered place was like "a queen's secluded garden"; and there was one poplar that stood just within, slender as a cypress, and cast its reflection across the pool, and the moon's face looked out from behind it on the sleeping water. We called it the "Little Princess Poplar," and her three brothers kept guard outside and lent their shadows to make the whole mass of the house-shadow look as if we had a minaret shooting up from the north gable.

The shrub-planting was kept very cunningly below the bluff, not to break its outline from the house. You saw nothing different from the old view till you went to the edge, and there was all that beauty down below ; solid masses at the bottom, climbing in lighter growths, with nooks and spaces for tucking in a pet flower to spread its blossoms shyly till it was sought. There was room along the whole scarp for so much

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beauty! — and none of the natural lines interrupted. I must tell, just to plague the German gardeners, how her bulbs found their home at last. They simply took possession when invited of the hollow below the old windmill, all smothered now in *Clematis paniculata* up to the dizzy platform and the sails. There is always a little leakage here to freshen the grass which is never touched with a scythe till the last of the imperial family of Japanese iris has spent its bloom. (They had such names as "Smoke after Battle," or "Clouds before Dawn.")

The new house was in the nature of things: one can be hardy and even perennial and still need a few bathrooms. But those wise parents kept the low lines of the old house, which was only low of necessity, and the studio-lighting mother loved was repeated in a more finished way in the two rooms facing west which would have been shaded by the veranda roof. It gave distinction to the dining-room, as a high wainscot does, with band-windows near the ceiling and the very curtains you would wish strung across the keen sky-blue: as she chose the curtains there was no mistake made as to their color.

But in the library — the room which spoke of her! — there were wonderful windows of glass-painting that transformed the light into a strange, flowing design carrying from space to space crossed by the lead lines — cool, opaline colors with here and there the opal's heart of fire. You knew, if you knew anything of glass, that a master made them. Our master, when he was young, had been a protégé of her

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father's whose perspicacious eye saw the genius in his work when all New York, except Frederick Bonham and the judgments he controlled, were laughing at it. And here it was in its priceless maturity! It would have taken a good deal of mother's affluence (that came to her from her Aunt Essie who had her husband's money at her disposal after his death) to have paid for those windows. It was intended, I know, that they should be an order, but their artist superbly insisted they were (and had been from the first) a gift—to the room itself! and would have them to be a gift. He said nothing, for he was a sensitive person, about indebtedness to her father for sympathy—and perhaps some more substantial form of help—at a critical time in his young struggles. He had come out there one summer on his way to somewhere else and stayed a fortnight (apparently to his own surprise). There were oceans of talk, like the talk I heard in Italy when I went abroad with mother and we visited her astonishing Aunt Essie in a great sixteenth-century villa where you moved among terraces and frescoed chambers with ceilings you could not see, as if you were in a Hall of Dreams.

Our mother could drop her household speech and enter into any other fashion of words her company demanded, but when the guest was gone *it* was gone,—that intoxication, as it must have been, of the old brilliant atmosphere. Father, I observed, enjoyed it; though he sat silent and was manifestly out of the game. He was never in spirit out of any of her

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games that for want of practice he could take no part in. And she had the sweetest, humblest respect for that want of practice. She knew the cost of inordinate skill in words; its dissipating mental effect and its dangers to human intercourse. In all these ways, for a woman so clever as she, so experienced in all societies, that humility, that sober, qualifying power was to my mind the most remarkable thing about her, the highest proof of her training.

She had her own little sudden ways of petting us and showing us we were adored. She always made it somehow impersonal—of that art she was past-mistress!

"Sit there a moment, Phœbe," she said one day and pointed to a chair at the library-table. It stands under those jeweled windows a little out from the books, facing the room. I sat as bidden and felt, as you do feel color almost palpably, the splendor stream over me and saw it in spots and splashes on my hands and arms resting on the table. She stepped off a little and looked at me with her happy eyes and murmured some words from the "Paradiso":—

"O perpetual flowers of the eternal gladness,—"

"Phœbe!" she cried, "you look this minute as if angels were scattering those flowers on your head, dear child!"

She had this joy in things on which she set her own values that had nothing to do with price. If she had waited for grand occasions to wear her beautiful things, we should not have known her in them:—she

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would put on "Aunt Essie's pearls," or some old trifling chain of curious workmanship, spoils of the studio-days, with equal contentment, whichever suited her mood. Our windows, that were entirely as well as literally "over the heads" of most of our visitors, she liked to think were nothing but genius and sunshine — which is cheap on the mesa — and scraps of lead and lumps of glass. They made a poem of that room for her. They bloomed in their unfading splendor in all the lights, in all the hours of our happy days. In moonlight they were marvelous, like sea-deeps lighted through the waves. They scattered those imperishable flowers —

"O perpetui fiori eterna letizia —"

upon the heads of us all, upon her head the dearest! I can see her at that table, her profile with the beautiful eyelid dark-shaded underneath. She might have been checking up bills; — she looked like a goddess who has given away her immortal youth and beauty and consented to human weariness and motherhood and housekeeping and gray hairs.

How much more I have said than I meant to say! It seemed most difficult at first to add my words to hers that were her last. But having started I find myself rambling on for pure love of the memories which are all we have left of her now.

I am restless here in New York when I think of the adorable place out there alone. There are precious reasons why I should love it — "top of the world,"

she called it. It was there I reached the summit of a girl's happiness. But that was long ago!

Jack — Jack Landreth — and I are not in the least related, though I have always heard of his father and mother as "Uncle Jack and Aunt Essie." He had taken his medical degree at Johns Hopkins and he was in Paris studying, the last year I was at Dieu-donné, a school a little way out of the city. There were three other American girls, all as homesick as we could be. His mother came out to visit him (and get some clothes) and she paid me a visit, of course, as she is my step-aunt; and she gave us all, the Americans, a tea — the most splendid little affair she could make it. She came down again on purpose to cast a motherly eye over my school-girl wardrobe — dissatisfied, I could see she was, though she made not a single comment, and she dressed me for that tea, hat and all, as you would turn your hand over! There was a bouquet with Jack's card, but as it went with my dress exactly, and as he had never seen me in his life, I concluded he had n't had much to do with it.

He lounged in, however, quite thrown in the shade by one or two very fine personages who had consented to grace the occasion — our own Ambassadress for one. He gathered us all in with his strange eyes with long corners, the aloof yet penetrating look of a born doctor, or a born artist. Our dear one said he was exactly what her father, his grandfather Bonham, might have been if he had been spared the artist temperament. I am thankful Jack escaped — though

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every time I visit his family I wonder how he managed to. I thought, as soon as I saw him, that he was like her — our mother — more like her than either of her own sons; the same supple lengths defying age, the small, beautifully poised head and fine dark hair, the finest — that ruffles a little at the edges like fur. The eager, Spartan profile, every scrap of tissue eliminated from those delicate, stressful features, and the long, splendid eyes! And even her manner — gentle and deliberate that sets you at ease; that manner most necessary to a doctor.

He came boiling out to see us the summer after we both got home; he was awfully thin, overworked, underweight — a few things had happened in Paris before his mother left. He said it was done — *he* was done — right there and then. But it was the mesa that finished me.

I must not let myself dream and dote. He is certainly (now that she is no longer here) the “dearest, sweetest, cleverest,” but I wish he were not also one of the “maddest of the mad Bonhams,” born to win hearts and to break them. But if my heart must break, at least it will be proud! He has gone to France, my boy who has a boy of his own as old as I was when this tale began — began, I mean, on the mesa. Jack is older than my father when he married the second time; and still he is a boy, if that means he is ready, as youth is ready, to give itself to a beautiful idea.

I made, I am ashamed to say, one little plea — he looked at me surprised!

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"Why, dear, who *is* to go, if not fellows like me whose children have mothers like you, and all of you safe from want! It's that hob-goblin money of Great-Aunt Essie that sets me free."

So there it is again — that bewitched money! — that's always trying to justify its existence in a family where it does n't belong. Was "Uncle Charles" so infatuated with her? I thought her, I must say, a dreadful old creature with her powder and low gowns and jewels, and eyes like jewels in a strange setting of pale, wrinkled eyelids, and the tiniest feet and the highest slippers — the feet of a Fairy Godmother. Perhaps he was ironical, as to say: "Here it is, the money you married me for. Take it all and do with it what you dare!" She dared give it to her own nieces — in return for not being a better aunt to them, perhaps, when they were young motherless girls struggling with cares beyond them.

Or, he might have loved them himself — they must have been so charming! They had the graces of their poverty — the graces poverty can't afford not to have. And he knew there was greed without grace on his own side. Mother thought that, kind as he was, he was lazy too, tired of his great wealth, bored with thinking how to divide it and not sow quarrels amongst his shoals of relatives. So he left it all to her who had no conscience about kin, especially his kin.

I must not offend her ghost or she will haunt me with dreams of what that witch-money may do to me. . . . Ah, last night I had a dream! It might have been herself, for it was a goblin visit. Can any

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one imagine a woman asleep in her bed in New York seeing clear across to France — some of the sights her husband — does not dream of — *has* — before his eyes! Only, in my dream, it was the mesa, and guns — German guns — were shelling us from the Army Post across the valley; they had swept that up with one hand! Their flag flew on the sky in place of ours, and their aim was *us* — our home and the bench of land we stand on, three miles away. A perfect range, but scarcely a military necessity. I saw that even in a dream. I laughed!

“That must be revenge,” I said to myself crazily, “for insulting their flower-beds. Those are our German gardeners — they’ve not forgotten!” They were planting shell after shell where no shadows would ever rest again; they were tearing out the heart of the hill in great gobs — the house must go next, I thought. It went. One crash like a thunderbolt in the front face and our beautiful windows were gone. The dwelling stood in two pieces, a ruined thing, and stared into its own grave. I saw clear through it into the court where the galleries were on fire, and the rose-vines hung in blackened strings. The pool was as red as blood. A wind stormed over the hill and shook the poplars — they stood up pale in awful light and rocked distracted, and the greatest of them heeled over and went head down into the gulf that was our lawn.

There seemed then to come a pause. I heard no more near explosions, only booming far off down the valley. “More homes,” I thought, “are going.

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They will take all the farmers' stuff, they will ruin the ditches—the whole country will be a desert as it was before." Then I looked again and *we* were as we were before! Thirty years were gone in an hour. There was nothing there. Only the windmill, the bare derrick, standing out against the sky alone. The sails buzzed faster and faster till the wind rose too strong, and then they clamped themselves and were still. And I heard that sound I used to hear in my bed at night when I lay sick out there in the fever, and thought it was footsteps, hundreds of frightened footsteps running round the house. There were no longer fields and orchards where ours have been since I was a little girl; all the back-lands were the old desert, and in the weird moonlight which showed this picture of the past, I heard the cries of the desert's children at night, the coyotes' hunting-call.

I was awake now, but the dream was before my eyes much clearer than I can tell it. I said: "But that was n't the mesa—the mesa is safe enough—that is France, gone back to desert, that is Belgium, after their thousand years of culture. That is the least of what has happened over there. They had homes they loved and hoped to leave their children, little homes they made themselves, and old, splendid homes the centuries made and their fathers' fathers lived in. Great old trees and lovely roofs and towers and priceless windows. They saw them go like that, and it was no dream. And the cries—"

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. . . But Jack is over there, doing his blessed work. I was not quick to answer, but I have given much. He is a heaven-born doctor—he is in his prime; and slender as he is he is very strong; he can work long hours without sleep or rest. He has found for souls like his the only rest.

And I am not the only American woman by many thousands, thank God, who has been privileged to give, out of her very being, to the side we belong on in this war. It would be meanness, in the case of our men who have gone to the fronts, to scrutinize motives or compare the gifts each had to give. Some of the lightest lenders went through, caught up in a sudden holy joy, and finished the sacrifice. And all have in some sense found their wings, and a higher path than safety out of the chicken-yard we seem to have become under a clucking administration. . . . Though any day, while the struggle lasts and no one can say their chance is gone, we may be called on to reverse our present judgments, we shamed and bitter ones. God grant we may!

Meantime, poor America, count thy jewels! They are ours and they are humanity's too—they seem many of them to have been born and to have waited for this hour. The fliers, struck down from those cold and lonely heights, the ambulance-drivers on the shell-torn battle-fronts, those who fought typhus in Serbia and hunger in Belgium: men and women with reputations and a finished technique to give to the work, men with nothing but themselves who threw down the job and slipped into the ranks of the

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Allies to drop unnoticed beside their war brothers, under a flag not theirs.

We might thank them for helping to save our face as a nation, but if we praise them ourselves, let it not be done as to Americans! They are the Frenchmen who fought for us when our national history was made; they are the Englishmen who gave their swords and fortunes to Greece in her tormented uprisings; they are the English and French who bled for Italy, when E. B. B., that great lover of Italy, heard a little child go singing "'neath Casa Guidi windows by the church, —

“ ‘ O bella liberta,
O bella ! ’ ”

Which takes us back to an earlier chapter of this story, and to poor old Captain Nashe, of damaged memory. And almost as if she followed my words, I can fancy our mother saying: “Spare him a flower, wherever he lies forgotten! He was one of them once—he gave his life. It was n't his fault that he missed the good fortune to lose it.”

And if he had! If Fate had been kind enough to take him, young, with Garibaldi's kiss fresh on his dying face,—what would it have done to her, our Dearest?—who might never have been ours if he had not crossed her path in his shabby days and parted her from her father.

The difference, to us, is utterly incalculable, but she would have been the same. Wherever she had lived, in whatever society or circumstances, the greater

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love, the greater understanding, would have been hers, the wrath for "a wrong not thine" and, in due time, the greater forgiveness. I remember her quoting once, " ' Pardon is a fruit that we must not gather green. We must wait till it falls from the tree.' "

THE END

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